

Fall  
2017

# Western CAROLINA

THE MAGAZINE OF WESTERN CAROLINA UNIVERSITY



## Diversity Dialogues

Sidewalk chalkings  
lead to campus  
conversations

NEW PROGRAM OFFERS SUPPORT  
FOR PARENTLESS STUDENTS

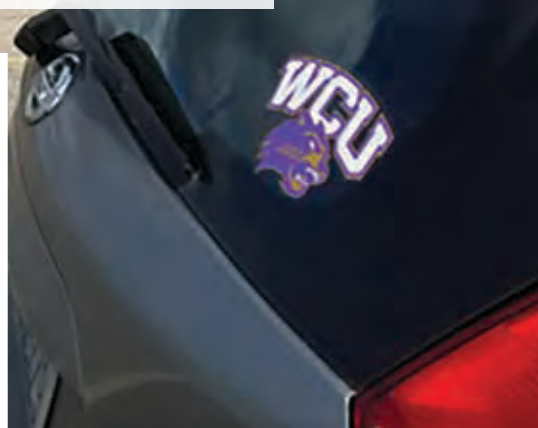
UNIVERSITY SELECTS 'CHEROKEE'  
FOR YEARLONG LEARNING THEME

CATAMOUNTS MAKE A DIFFERENCE  
AS PEACE CORPS VOLUNTEERS

## WCU Sticker Contest Winners Announced

As part of an online contest announced in the winter 2017 edition of The Magazine of Western Carolina University, alumni and friends from all over the country and even Jamaica shared their #CatamountPride by posting to WCU's Facebook, Twitter or Instagram accounts photos of WCU stickers on their vehicles. Stickers were included in every copy of the magazine, and readers tell us they have spotted an increasing number of WCU decals on vehicles traveling the highways and byways across the state and the nation.

The grand prize of season passes to all of the Catamounts' home games for the 2017-18 season, with the winner selected at random, went to **Lesli Williams Moss '07** of Gastonia (1). Three contestants won insulated WCU coffee tumblers for their winning entries in various categories: **Danny Hirt '73** of Fredericksburg, Texas, for submitting a photograph of the vehicle surrounded by the most purple (2); **Donna Howell '87** of Young Harris, Georgia, for her photograph of the most unusual vehicle to sport the #CatamountPride sticker, a 1931 Pontiac coupe (3); and **Chris Watras '08 MSW '11** from Mount Vernon, Washington, for his entry from the farthest away from campus, at 2,742 miles from Cullowhee (4).



# Western CAROLINA

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[magazine.wcu.edu](http://magazine.wcu.edu)

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## BACK COVER

A Cherokee artisan molds a piece of pottery using clay from the mountains and fire to create vessels for utilitarian, ceremonial and decorative uses. That craftsmanship and heritage will be on display Saturday, Sept. 30, at Mountain Heritage Day and will be included in this academic year's campus learning theme of "Cherokee: Community. Culture. Connections."

# OPENING *Notes*



One of my first priorities after becoming chancellor in 2011 was to initiate the development of a robust and focused strategic plan for Western Carolina University. That ambitious roadmap, our “2020 Vision,” was designed to steer our university’s direction and development over the ensuing decade while strengthening relationships with the communities and region we serve. It’s hard to believe that more than five years have passed since the Board of Trustees endorsed the plan and even harder to believe that less than three remain before we hit the year 2020.

The “2020 Vision” plan has guided our university in dynamic fashion, strengthening the institution in many ways. Since the plan’s onset, WCU certainly has grown at a record-breaking pace, but we have done more than simply become larger. We also have matured, and our metrics of success have improved. Our students, faculty and staff have done amazing things, many of which you will read about in the pages that follow. But this is no time to rest on our laurels. Instead, this is a time to recalibrate, to review and to update our plan. Academic year 2017-18 will be a time of reflection and renewal and a time to recommit to our strategic vision and priorities as we move forward. Three primary factors necessitate this activity at this juncture.

First, we have accomplished and, in a number of areas, exceeded many of the goals and initiatives articulated in the plan. There is much of which all university stakeholders should be rightfully proud. Conversely, however, we should consider whether initiatives that we have not yet addressed are as important as they were when the plan was endorsed in 2012. In addition, new priorities have emerged in the last few years that should be incorporated into our strategic plan. The legislative actions that resulted in the NC Promise tuition plan and the launching of a new laboratory school effort this fall are but two examples of priorities unimagined when the “2020 Vision” plan was formulated.

Second, the process of undergoing reaffirmation of the university’s accreditation by the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools Commission on Colleges has revealed some opportunities for improvement that we should consider in our revised strategic plan. For instance, our team of external reviewers has recommended that we focus on more consistent assessment processes across the university, a recommendation that we must integrate into the plan.

Finally, the recently approved University of North Carolina strategic plan, “Higher Expectations,” has clear implications for the work of individual UNC institutions, including WCU. Our strategic plan update must align with system goals, which

are centered on the areas of access, affordability and efficiency, student success, economic impact and community engagement, and excellent and diverse institutions. The good news is that, in many ways, the essence of the UNC system plan is right in WCU’s wheelhouse.

We have assembled a 16-member committee, under the leadership of **Carol Burton ’87 MAEd ’89**, associate provost for undergraduate studies, which is in the midst of an eight-month process of reviewing and revising the “2020 Vision” plan. This truly is an updating, not a from-the-ground-up comprehensive planning process. When the committee’s work is done by the year’s end, we should have a refreshed strategic plan that is grounded in our university’s mission and budgetary realities, albeit with an eye toward enhancing our fiscal resources; that reaffirms our commitment to excellence, student success, and external focus and engagement; that represents a shared, comprehensive vision; and that aligns with regional and state priorities, state and federal regulations, best practices and an intensifying demand for accountability.

The revised “2020 Vision” plan will be truly strategic, beginning with the end goal in mind – our vision of where WCU will be several years hence – rather than starting where we are today. While the latter approach can result in incremental progress, the former – the future perspective – is where transformative change begins.

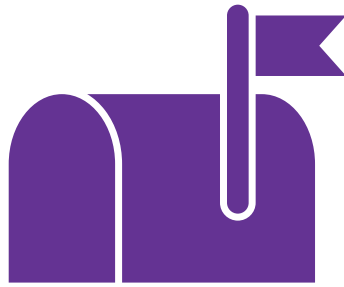
There will be ample opportunity for input from all university stakeholders – students, faculty, staff, alumni, donors, friends and residents of the region the university serves. Among those opportunities to help shape our university is through an online survey at the website [strategicplan.wcu.edu](http://strategicplan.wcu.edu). I encourage you to participate. We want to hear from you!

This is an exciting time for Western Carolina University, a place that is changing lives. I welcome your continuing involvement with your university by contributing to the process of revising our strategic plan. Together, we can chart the path to a bright future, one that capitalizes on our present momentum and that is grounded in our tradition of serving the people of Western North Carolina and meeting the needs of our region, state, nation and world. ■

Go Cats!

David O. Belcher  
Chancellor

# THE INBOX



## COMMENTS FROM OUR READERS

As a freshman in 1985, I did not realize Brown Cafeteria existed until I moved to Reynolds Hall for my sophomore year. I recall walking "down the hill" to class and noticing a building I had never seen. When I investigated, I was so surprised to find a cafeteria on "the Hill!" Dodson Cafeteria was full of activity and where you went to see and be seen. But I came to love Brown because it seemed so relaxed. I started eating in Brown often once I found it, as it felt like a hidden gem, only known to those who lived on "the Hill." I have fond memories of Brown, and look forward to seeing the renovations when I visit Western.

**Christian Cook '90 MPA '93**

My favorite memory of Brown Cafeteria has to be spring semester 1993. I was eating lunch with friends from my dorm when I walked a very tall guy wearing a fraternity jacket. My heart stopped and I knew he would be "the one." Turns out we had the same last name! Two years later, we eloped a day after graduation. He still makes my heart stop, 21 years and two kids later!

**Lori Frazier Frasure '95**

Brown Cafeteria memories...the pretty color of orange of the doors at the front entrance and the many different desserts.

**Lyndon Smith '61**

In an effort to find out why there was a WCU sticker in my magazine, I read that to enter your contest I had to reply by one of two types of social media. Well, right there I was left out. I do not subscribe to either one of your methods of entry. Since my back window already has seven stickers on it, I will just keep this sticker someplace where I hope I can find it when needed. I think it is a cheap promotion when there are people who went to WCC before even email was invented. 'Nuff said.

**Charles S. Boswell '66**

Thanks for my new sticker! This is a great marketing idea, and I hope it continues in every issue because I've got a couple more vehicles that need them! I, too, am tired of those dang evil 'A' stickers and love that WCU is taking a new vision on promoting a positive image and marketing. I just wish it had happened when I attended. Thanks again. Go Cats!

**Andrew Burton '05 MAT '10**

I just received my Western Carolina Magazine. I absolutely love the fact a WCU sticker was included! An awesome idea!

**Todd Herms '05 MPA '07**

After reading the winter 2017 WCU magazine from cover to cover, I just had to read again the article "Professor Provides Peruvian Perspective" and view that awesome photo of the professor and her students! Many decades ago, I stood where Professor **Beth Wall-Bassett '00** and her students stand in the picture! Details of her adventure brought back to me the wonderful memories I hold for taking 10 teenagers on an American Field Service Exchange to Peru. My students were from the coal-mining region of East Tennessee and apparently very healthy kids! I was the only person who succumbed to the dreadful revenge bestowed upon the Spaniards because of the Spanish invasion many centuries ago!

Eva Nell Mull Wike

Kudos to **Bill Studenc MPA '10** and staff on another wonderful magazine. I love Chancellor Belcher's openness and honesty about his illness. He is an inspiration. The story on Noble Hall is exciting with all its possibilities. I also commend the high quality of the photography.

Anna T. McFadden

After reading "Noble Culture," my mind was flooded with memories of the commercial strip referenced in the article and other memories of WCU: Maw, Coonie and Jimmy always being around; Cullowhee Five-O on patrol; Tripod the three-legged dog that hung around Dodson Cafeteria; throwing Frisbees one spring Saturday barefoot on the lawn between Helder and Leatherwood and the very next Saturday 4 inches of snow were on the same lawn; the Lambda Ki Alpha raft race where first place did not matter, but having the best "party raft" did; calling WCU "UCLA" (University of Cullowhee, left of Asheville); and, finally, driving up to the Jackson County Airport, looking down on the WCU campus and realizing what a truly beautiful place WCU is.

**Kevin Johnson '81**

I usually scan the magazine and find it to be interesting and informative. However, this time I find that, on page 33, there is an extremely offensive picture. To me, it does not matter how "artistic" this is supposed to be, it does not fit with my concept of my alma mater. If WCU has, indeed, succumbed to the liberal garbage that most colleges are embracing these days, then I am really ashamed to claim it as my school of record. It may be that only the "older, more conservative fuddy-duddy" graduates would feel this way, but I am sure there are others besides me, whether they express it to you or not.

**Joyce Roberts '60**



The photo in question, 2 Spectators Climbing a Tree, a sculpture by Gerit Grimm

**Have a comment about this issue? Let us hear from you!**

Email us at [magazinestories@wcu.edu](mailto:magazinestories@wcu.edu) or send us a letter to 420 H.F. Robinson, Cullowhee, N.C., 28723. We'll select a few to share with your fellow readers.

*Letters may be edited for clarity and length.*

# News From THE WESTERN HEMISPHERE



## POLICE OFFICER RECEIVES UNC SYSTEM'S 'TOP COP' AWARD

Jacob Deal '09 '15 discusses campus safety issues with students at Valley Ballyhoo, WCU's annual welcome back celebration.

Sgt. **Jacob Deal '09 '15** of the Western Carolina University Police Department is the inaugural recipient of the University of North Carolina system's Officer of the Year Award for Outstanding and Exceptional Service in recognition of his work in campus outreach activities, including those focusing on sexual assault prevention.

Deal, a member of the WCU Police Department since February 2011, received the award from UNC President Margaret Spellings during an annual meeting of the system's police chiefs in April in Chapel Hill. "Ensuring the safety and security of our campus communities will always be a top priority," Spellings said. "I applaud Sgt. Jacob Deal for his leadership in ensuring that Western Carolina University is a safe environment in which our students, faculty and staff can live, learn and grow."

Deal assumed responsibility for the WCU Police Department's Support Services Section in May 2015, taking on responsibility for leading its efforts in investigations, community programming, victim services, evidence room management and record-keeping. In that role, Deal began to actively promote the department's community programming activities to students, faculty and staff. In just one year, his efforts resulted in an increase of nearly 100 percent in the number of people who have attended police-delivered programs on campus safety, sexual assault awareness, crime prevention and active shooter training, said WCU Police Chief Ernie Hudson.

"It is important to note that much of our programming occurs after 'normal' business hours," Hudson said. "Sgt. Deal has personally attended and participated in most of these programs, as he

recognizes the importance of the safety of our community, crime prevention and community/police partnerships."

Deal also has been instrumental in the development of materials designed to assist and support the victims of crime, especially during vulnerable times early in an investigation, Hudson said. "As our experience tells us, victims can be overwhelmed by too much information presented at the outset of an investigation. Criminal investigations, university investigations, mental health and medical services, and community services can all seem too much to ask a victim to remember," he said. "Sgt. Deal also does a follow-up contact with victims to ensure that their questions or concerns are addressed and that they are fully aware of the various services and support groups available to them." ■

-By Bill Studenc MPA '10

## RASH RECEIVES PRESTIGIOUS GUGGENHEIM FELLOWSHIP



Poet and novelist Ron Rash (above), the John and Dorothy Parris Distinguished Professor of Appalachian Cultural Studies at Western Carolina University, is recipient of a prestigious Guggenheim Fellowship for 2017. Announcement of Rash's inclusion in the diverse group of 173 scholars, artists and scientists from the U.S. and Canada selected for the fellowships was made in April by the John Simon Guggenheim Memorial Foundation.

The fellowships are awarded "on the basis of prior achievement and exceptional promise," the foundation

said in announcing the recipients. Honorees were chosen from a group of almost 3,000 applicants in the organization's 93rd competition. Each of the 2017 recipients will receive a \$50,000 award to support his or her work.

"It truly is an honor for me to be chosen for this award, especially because many writers whom I admire have received this award in the past," said Rash, a resident of Cullowhee. "I am humbled to find myself mentioned alongside the likes of Cormac McCarthy, Margaret Atwood and Raymond Carver."

Rash came to WCU in 2003 to join the Department of English as the university's first Parris Distinguished Professor. His latest novel, "The Risen," hit bookstores last September. He is author of six other novels, including The New York Times bestseller "Serena," and numerous collections of short stories and poetry.

**Richard Starnes '92 MA '94**, dean of WCU's College of Arts and Sciences, said the fellowship provides another piece of evidence of the author's stature

on the national and international literary scene. "Ron Rash is the defining voice in Appalachian literature today, but he is so much more," Starnes said. "In the tradition of Eudora Welty and William Faulkner, Ron uses his native region to ask profound questions about the complexities of the human heart, man's relationship with nature, and sense of place. In this way, his work speaks to people everywhere with power and grace."

The fellowship is the latest in an ever-expanding roster of honors for the native of Boiling Springs. A teacher of poetry, literature and creative writing at WCU, Rash has received the Sherwood Anderson Prize, the Novella Festival Novel Award and the Frank O'Connor International Short Story Award and is twice winner of O. Henry awards. His 2015 "Above the Waterfall" was the Prince of Tides Literary Prize Winner in the Southern Independent Booksellers Alliance's 2016 Pat Conroy Southern Book Prize competition. ■

*-By Bill Studenc MPA '10*



## KLOEPPEL TAPPED TO LEAD GRADUATE SCHOOL, RESEARCH

Brian Kloeppel (above), who had been serving as interim dean of Western Carolina University's Graduate School and Research since July 2015, now is in the position on a permanent basis after approval of his appointment last summer by the Board of Trustees.

Named associate dean of the Graduate School in January 2013, he filled a vacancy created in June 2015 when Mimi Fenton, dean of Graduate School and Research for three years, stepped down to return to a faculty role in the Department of English. Appointment of Kloeppel to the permanent position

followed a national search.

"Brian distinguished himself as an exceptionally strong candidate through his outstanding service as interim dean and as associate dean before that," said Provost Alison Morrison-Shetlar. "Working in close collaboration with the deans and program directors, he made significant progress in the marketing and support of graduate education at WCU. This has resulted in increased enrollment in a number of our graduate programs."

Prior to coming to WCU in 2008, Kloeppel was a research faculty member

with the University of Georgia for 14 years and was the site director for the National Science Foundation-funded Long-Term Ecological Research Program at Coweeta Hydrologic Laboratory near Otto in Macon County. In addition to his role as an advocate for graduate education at WCU, Kloeppel serves as chief research officer for the university's Sponsored Research Office, which supports the faculty, staff and students who conduct research funded by external and internal sources. ■

*-By Bill Studenc MPA '10*



## WCU NAMED TO 'COLLEGES OF DISTINCTION' LIST FOR 2017

Recreational therapy student Gretchen Reece and Nettie Green, a resident of the Hermitage assisted living facility in Sylva, enjoy an adaptive device bicycle ride.

Western Carolina University has been recognized as one of America's "Colleges of Distinction" for 2017 by a national guidebook and online resource, citing WCU as where students go "to learn, to grow and to succeed" in an environment that prioritizes faculty-student mentoring and outstanding teaching as well as diverse academic and co-curricular programs.

Since 1999, the Colleges of Distinction website and guidebook have recognized and honored schools throughout the U.S. for excellence in undergraduate-

focused higher education. The listings are designed for prospective college students, their parents and high school counselors.

High school counselors and educators make the nominations. Each nominated college is then evaluated on key indicators including student engagement, student empowerment and curricular innovation. The selection process also includes a review of each institution's freshman experience, as well as its general education program, strategic plan, alumni success and

satisfaction measures. WCU is one of 10 North Carolina institutions included in the current edition.

"High student engagement in college is one of the keys to a successful undergraduate education," said Tyson Schritter, Colleges of Distinction executive editor. "With an increasing emphasis on hands-on learning techniques, (we) applaud Western Carolina University for practicing methodologies that prepare students for their futures." ■

-By Geoff Cantrell



## THREE WCU FACULTY MEMBERS NAMED FULBRIGHT SCHOLARS

Three Western Carolina University faculty members have been named recipients of prestigious Fulbright Scholar awards and will be engaged in individual scholarly projects in Hungary, New Zealand and Mexico. They are Mimi Fenton, professor of English; Turner Goins, the university's Ambassador Jeanette Hyde Distinguished Professor of Gerontological Social Work; and Paul Worley, assistant professor of English and director of the graduate program in English.

The Fulbright Program is the flagship international exchange initiative sponsored by the U.S. government and is administered through the U.S. Department of State's Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs. The Fulbright U.S. Scholar Program in which Fenton, Goins and Worley will participate sends approximately 800

American scholars and professionals to about 130 countries annually to lecture or conduct research in a variety of academic and professional fields.

While WCU has had faculty participation in the program in the past, it is rare for a regional comprehensive university of its size to have three recipients in the same year, and it is an indicator of the overall quality of the faculty, said Alison Morrison-Shetlar, WCU provost. "These faculty members continue to be an inspiration to our community, and especially to our students who, through faculty mentorship and engagement in scholarly endeavors, also may aspire to excellence in a variety of ways, including by seeking Fulbright awards. I am proud of the recognition these awards have brought to WCU," Morrison-Shetlar said.

Fenton's teaching and research

will take her to Budapest, Hungary, from January through June in 2018 to continue her internationally recognized scholarship into the works of English literary giant John Milton. Goins' research project will lead her to New Zealand from February through November in 2018, where she will take a qualitative approach in examining the meanings, beliefs and practices of healthy aging among a group of older Māori, the indigenous people of that country. Worley will be teaching English at a university in Mexico and collaborating with faculty members there to create English language pedagogical materials designed to assist speakers of the indigenous language Tsotsil Maya as they seek to become teachers and speakers of English. ■

*-By Randall Holcombe*

From left, Mimi Fenton, Paul Worley and Turner Goins are WCU's Fulbright Scholars.

## DEVELOPMENT, ALUMNI ENGAGEMENT DIVISION IS NOW 'ADVANCEMENT'

The unit formerly known as the Division of Development and Alumni Engagement is gearing up for the public phase of Western Carolina University's comprehensive fundraising campaign by making some internal changes aimed at better positioning the campaign for success. In addition to the recent appointment of an assistant vice chancellor and wrapping up searches that are currently underway to fill vacant development director positions, the division has changed the sign on the front door of its suite. Effective July 1, the unit is known simply as Advancement.

The new name for the unit was approved recently by the university's Executive Council and is based on a

recommendation after a comprehensive administrative program review completed by Washburn and McGoldrick, a national consulting firm that has worked with educational institutions across the country.

The more succinct name "Advancement" is designed to recognize the change in leadership last year from an associate vice chancellor to a permanent vice chancellor and to more accurately represent the comprehensive nature of the role of the unit, said Lori Lewis, the division's vice chancellor. "We are not only responsible for alumni engagement and fundraising but also outreach and communication to all constituents about the impact of gifts

as well as the importance of financially supporting and being involved with WCU," Lewis said.

Although the university once had a Division of Advancement and External Affairs, the change of name for the unit does not reflect a return to that old organizational structure, Lewis said. WCU's external affairs functions – including marketing, communications, public relations, government relations and special events – which were part of the previous division that was dissolved in 2013, remain under the executive leadership of Chief of Staff Melissa Canady Wargo in the Chancellor's Division. ■

*-By Bill Studenc MPA '10*

## JOHNSON-BUSBIN NAMED ONE OF UNC SYSTEM'S TOP TEACHERS



Julie Johnson-Busbin interacts with students in the College of Business.

Julie Johnson-Busbin, professor of sales and marketing in Western Carolina University's College of Business, has been named one of the top teachers in the University of North Carolina system in recognition of her ability to present information that is applicable to students' professional and personal lives and to help them succeed in the business world. The 2017 UNC Board of Governors Award for Excellence in Teaching also recognizes Johnson-Busbin's knack for helping students develop an improved outlook about themselves and their potential for success.

"My goal is to afford students the chance to try new skills, receive feedback, critique themselves and try again. I like to push students when they haven't reached as far as they

are capable, yet provide support when they've stretched as far as they can," she said. "What I would argue is that often the actual content of the class is not what students remember several years down the road. I believe that it is helping students better understand themselves and giving them insight into the potential that makes each one unique."

WCU alumni now employed by companies such as E\*TRADE, Financial Corp, United Parcel Service, Sherwin-Williams and IBM raved about Johnson-Busbin's performance as a teacher and her impact on their success as students and

professionals. A former student said Johnson-Busbin "has an innate ability to state the facts of the 'real world' to her students and prepare them for those realities better than any other educator I've been around."

Johnson-Busbin and the 16 other recipients of the UNC honor, representing an array of academic disciplines, were nominated by special committees on their home campuses and selected by the Board of Governors Committee on Personnel and Tenure. Winners receive a commemorative bronze medallion and \$12,500 cash prize. The board established the awards in April 1994 to underscore the importance of teaching and to reward good teaching across the university system. ■

*-By Randall Holcombe*



Robert Dinsdale  
MSA '08 checks  
out the site of the  
Catamount School.

budget enacted last July. Under the legislation, the lab schools must be located in public school districts where at least 25 percent of schools have been classified as low-performing, based on student achievement data. They will operate as public schools of choice, with a mission to improve student performance in eligible school districts and provide exposure and training for teachers and principals to successfully address challenges existing in high-needs school settings.

Jackson County school officials have worked side-by-side with university personnel in solidifying the details for the Catamount School, said former superintendent **Michael Murray MAEd '88 EdS '05 EdD '08**, now leading Cherokee Central Schools. "Jackson County Public Schools are excited for this unique opportunity to build on our collaborative educational partnership

## WCU LAUNCHES THE CATAMOUNT SCHOOL THIS FALL

Western Carolina University and Jackson County Public Schools are collaborating on the formation of a lab school designed to help students in grades six through eight successfully transition into high school through implementation of a "whole school, whole community, whole child" approach. Christened "the Catamount School" and located on the campus of Smoky Mountain High School, the school will have the capacity to serve 25 students in each of the eligible grade levels (six through eight). It is scheduled to be in operation when the 2017-18 school year begins.

WCU is one of eight University of North Carolina system institutions identified as candidates to establish and operate laboratory schools serving students in kindergarten through eighth grade, as required by a provision in the 2016-17 state

with Western Carolina University and form an innovative new choice for our middle-level students," Murray said. "This program will be an excellent example of combining the strengths of both organizations proactively to focus on the whole child during the developmental stage when our children need it the most."

Under the legislation mandating the formation of lab schools, the school's principal and teachers will be employees of WCU. The university's Board of Trustees will be the governing body for the school, with responsibility for its operation and outcomes. The board approved **Robert Dinsdale MSA '08**, former Smoky Mountain assistant principal, as Catamount School director. ■

-By Bill Studenc MPA '10

## WINTER LEADING COLLEGE OF EDUCATION, ALLIED PROFESSIONS

Kim Winter (right), former associate dean for academic affairs in the College of Education and Allied Professions, now has a much shorter job title. That's because Winter was approved in April by the executive committee of the WCU Board of Trustees to take on the role of dean, succeeding Dale Carpenter, who returned to a faculty position July 1. Winter had been serving as associate dean since 2012.

As associate dean, director of WCU's teacher and professional education programs and professor in the School of Teaching and Learning, Winter had proven herself up to the task of leading the academic unit that is tied most closely to WCU's founding as a teacher preparatory institution, Provost Alison Morrison-Shetlar said.

"This is an especially critical time for the College of Education and Allied Professions as we prepare to launch the

Catamount School this fall and as we continue to work to help solve a growing teacher shortage facing our state," Morrison-Shetlar said. "Dr. Winter's familiarity with these issues, as well as her experiences in the allied fields of human services and psychology, will allow her to hit the ground running on day one in the dean's office."

Winter said her varied roles as a public school teacher, university faculty member, program coordinator, associate chair, intern, fellow, administrator and parent make her "uniquely suited" to serve as dean. "I have learned so much in the nearly five years I have been here. It is my belief that you learn to become a leader and continue to learn in your role. It is not an easy task to quantify all that I have learned during this time, but know this - the learning never stops," she said. ■

-By Bill Studenc MPA '10





## UNC BOARD INCLUDES FOUR FORMER WCU TRUSTEES

From left, Tom Fetzer and Carolyn Coward share a moment during their final meeting as members of the WCU Board of Trustees.

The bad news is that Western Carolina University has lost two members of its Board of Trustees. The good news is that WCU now is very well-represented on the University of North Carolina Board of Governors, with four former trustees serving on the UNC system's policy-making body.

Earlier this year, the N.C. House of Representatives elected Asheville attorney Carolyn Coward, who had been serving as WCU board secretary, to the Board of Governors, while the N.C. Senate elected former Raleigh mayor Thomas H. Fetzer, a trustee at WCU since 2015, to the UNC board.

They joined fellow former WCU trustees W. Louis Bissette Jr., an Asheville attorney who is serving as chairman of the UNC board, and C. Philip Byers MPA '99, a Rutherford County educational foundation executive.

Filling the remaining two years of the terms of Coward and Fetzer on the WCU board are **Timothy W. Haskett '82 MBA '84** of Kings Mountain and **Rebecca H. Schlosser '73** of Greensboro. Haskett, a native of Sylva, has held a variety of finance-related positions during his 32-year career with Duke Energy. A Greensboro resident, Schlosser is a former high school teacher and a current community volunteer.

In addition, **Haden Boliek MS '94** of Fayetteville and Robert C. Roberts of Asheville were appointed to full four-year terms on the WCU board that began July 1. They fill vacancies created as trustees F. Edward Broadwell Jr. of Asheville and Phil Drake of Franklin completed their terms in June.

Boliek is founder of Pediatric Developmental Therapy Inc., a

multidisciplinary practice offering speech, physical and occupational therapy. She also hosts the twice-a-month "Working Therapist Podcast." Roberts is regional executive vice president for First Citizens Bank & Trust Co. and serves as chairman of the Greater Asheville Regional Airport Authority.

Appointments to the WCU board were approved by the Board of Governors, which also endorsed the reappointments of trustees **Gaither Keener '72** of Mooresville and **Kenny D. Messer '86** of Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, to four-year terms.

In addition, the General Assembly reappointed **Joyce Conseen Dugan '75 MAEd '81** of Cherokee and John R. Lupoli of Highlands to four-year terms. ■

## WCU NAMED A 'BEST COLLEGE VALUE' BY KIPLINGER'S MAGAZINE

Western Carolina University once again has been named a 2017 "Best College Value" in an annual review of colleges and universities released by Kiplinger's Personal Finance magazine. WCU is ranked 98th among public higher education institutions across the nation in terms of value for in-state students and 83rd for out-of-state students. The rankings are based on admission and retention rates, student-faculty ratios, four-year graduation rates, costs of attending, financial

aid and average debt of students at graduation.

"We are pleased that Western Carolina University once again has been recognized as one of the top 100 values among public colleges and universities in the nation," said Chancellor David O. Belcher. "We believe this to be an especially important ranking because it incorporates measurements of both academic quality and affordability, with more weight given to academic quality. Affordability and academic quality are

precisely what prospective students and their parents say are among their top issues when deciding where to go for a college education."

WCU is one of seven schools in North Carolina ranked among its top 100 public college values. The magazine's review begins with a list of 1,200 public and private schools, with a final 300 evaluated as a best value, said Janet Bodnar, editor of Kiplinger's Personal Finance. ■

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## 23 NEW ENDOWED SCHOLARSHIP FUNDS CREATED

Friends and alumni of Western Carolina University continue to respond to Chancellor David O. Belcher's plea for additional financial assistance to help deserving students be able to attend the university, with 23 new endowed scholarship funds created in recent months.

During his 2012 installation address, Belcher identified increased funding for student support as the institution's top philanthropic priority. Through endowments of at least \$25,000, scholarship assistance can be awarded on an annual and ongoing basis. New endowed scholarship funds established since Oct. 31, 2016, are:

Dr. William R. Higgins Endowed English Scholarship, for students majoring in English; donors **Gerald Matheny '70** and Judy Matheny.

Bradshaw Family College of Business Endowed Scholarship, for College of Business students with demonstrated financial need, with preference to marketing majors; donors **Brad Bradshaw '76** and Eileen Bradshaw.

Randall and Sybil Duckett Endowed Scholarship, to support one undergraduate student and one graduate student in the College of Education and Allied Professions; donors represented by Thomas Duckett and Laura Duckett.

Joan and Chris Meister Endowed Scholarship, to be awarded in alternate years to students pursuing degrees in the College of Education and Allied Professions and the College of Engineering and Technology, with preference to first-generation students; donors Joan Meister and Pam Meister.

Coach Johnny Wike Athletic Scholarship, awarded to student-athletes competing on either the football team or men's or women's golf teams, with preference to teacher education majors; donors represented by **Matt Wike '91**.

Sherwin-Williams Company Endowed Scholarship, for students pursuing degrees in the College of Business, with preference to sales or marketing majors; donor Sherwin-Williams Company.

Honors College Endowed Scholarship, for students admitted to the Honors College; donors represented by Jill Granger.

**Karen Styles '94** Endowed Scholarship, for students majoring in recreational therapy; donors represented by Jennifer Hinton and **Brenda Holcombe '94**.

Bruce and Mary Clayton Family Endowed Scholarship, for students pursuing a major in the College of Business, with preference to Jackson County residents; donor **Bruce Clayton '71**.

Mark A. Tedder Family Endowed Athletic Scholarship, for student-athletes, with preference to N.C. students in the

College of Business; donor **Mark A. Tedder '75**.

Ted and Avis Phillips Scholarship, for members of the football team from Western North Carolina, with preference to student-athletes from Graham County; donors represented by **Teddy Phillips Jr.**

Michael Paysour Parks and Recreation Management Endowed Scholarship, for students majoring in parks and recreation management; donor **Michael Paysour '74**.

KKSB (Kappa Kappa Soccer Babes) Legacy Endowed Scholarship, for sophomores, juniors or seniors on the women's soccer team; donors represented by **Tina Weaver '04**.

Ed and Donna Broadwell Scholarship, for undergraduate students who graduated from public high schools in Western North Carolina; donors Ed and Donna Broadwell.

Daniel B. Yoe Family Endowed Scholarship, for students in the College of Business with demonstrated financial need; donor **Daniel Yoe '74**.

Dr. Daryl L. Hale Endowed Scholarship, for juniors or seniors majoring in philosophy or in special or interdisciplinary studies; donor **Brandon A. Robinson '05 MA '10**.

Harold E. and Henrietta (Saltz) Anderson Endowed Scholarship, for students majoring in teacher education or in birth-kindergarten education; donor Estate of Harold E. Anderson.

Florence Bannon Endowed Nursing Scholarship, for students enrolled in the RN to BSN program; donor Florence Bannon.

Gaither M. Keener Political Science Scholarship in Honor of Dr. Gerald Schwartz, for students majoring in political science; donor **Gaither M. Keener '72**.

Myra Grant Endowed Scholarship, for students with demonstrated financial need; donor **Myra Grant '70**.

Susan Brummell Belcher College of Fine and Performing Arts Endowed Scholarship, for students majoring in any program in the College of Fine and Performing Arts; donors David O. Belcher and Susan Brummell Belcher.

Drew Lewis White Memorial Scholarship, for first-generation college students with demonstrated financial need, with preference to students from Ohio and Western North Carolina; donors Lori A. Lewis and Jeffrey K. White.

Dorothy P. Bell College of Fine and Performing Arts Endowed Scholarship, for students with demonstrated financial need majoring in any program in the College of Fine and Performing Arts; donor John L. Bell.

For information on how to establish an endowed scholarship, visit the website [give.wcu.edu](http://give.wcu.edu). ■



## WHEE RANK

CULLOWHEE IS NAMED A TOP 10 SPOT FOR COLLEGE BASKETBALL FANS

By TODD VINYARD

Clockwise from above, WCU's Ramsey Center made a national list of top spots for college hoops, thanks in part to the game-day atmosphere contributed to by the cheer and dance teams, Purple Thunder drum line and the Cathouse Band.

The website WalletHub.com crunched the numbers earlier this year to determine a list of the "Best & Worst Cities for College Basketball Fans in 2017." North Carolina has three cities in the top 10. Chapel Hill at No. 1 and Durham at No. 3 probably wouldn't raise any eyebrows. The No. 10 pick may – Cullowhee.

The unincorporated Jackson County community is home to Western Carolina University – and men's and women's basketball teams that combined last season to win only 17 of their 62 games. So how did Cullowhee score a Top 10 ranking?

WalletHub analyst Jill Gonzales said that factors beyond wins and losses are taken into account when identifying the top cities for college basketball fans. "Western Carolina has about a 50 percent win percentage over the last three seasons. Not the best, but certainly better than almost 150 teams analyzed in the 30th or 40th percentile," Gonzales said.

"The team has a large social media following relative to the size of the

school/town, which certainly helps. It also has the ability to fit a large chunk of its student population into its arena, something that Cameron Indoor certainly can't boast," she said. "As Cullowhee exemplifies, teams with decent play and followings can certainly climb to the top, as well."

Chad Gerrety, WCU associate athletics director for external affairs, conceded the school was surprised by the ranking, but said the athletics department strives to make each game in Cullowhee as fan-friendly as possible.

"We appreciate it, and the ranking did surprise us, especially when you see the size schools and cities we are ranked with. We would be glad to have a team like Kentucky or Duke come experience our atmosphere," Gerrety said. "Seriously, several people in our athletics department in various jobs worked hard to make sure basketball is fun for students and families. It doesn't cost an arm and leg, and things like parking are free. We've worked hard to put an emphasis on the atmosphere and making it the best it can be."

Along with the atmosphere at games, WCU athletics has more than 13,000 followers on Twitter (@Catamounts) and more than 31,000 followers on Facebook. Gerrety said WCU's marketing and ticket operations offices target group sales and halftime acts to provide entertainment at games at the 7,826-seat Ramsey Center.

He also credited a committee of students, administrators and others that was formed after the 2015-16 season to explore ways to enhance the fan experience. "It really helped us take some steps in the right direction," Gerrety said. "Among the things we heard was people would like a few Saturday night games. Their kids had activities in the day on Saturday and they wanted the chance to come at night. We worked that in, and it was successful. We've got more to do from the committee's suggestions, but it was good to hear those ideas and listen to what was being said."

The effort has helped with the fan experience, said Jackson County resident **Michael Forbis '02**. "My mom and dad go to almost every game, and

they take our boys a lot. The ushers are always friendly, and they greet us by name they see us so often. It is great to have something like this in a rural community to help expose your kids to a bigger picture and not just be at home playing video games,” Forbis said.

“If you were going to do this in a larger city the cost could be 10 times higher, especially with things like the Catamount Kids Club that offer discounts on tickets to kids for joining,” he said. “Western in general is a great place to take in events that are not tremendously expensive, especially for young families.”

Students enjoy the basketball opportunities, too. “It is definitely nice to have these type of events on campus,” said WCU student Kendra Graham. “The friends I’ve made here at WCU and I try to experience new things like the basketball games and sporting events, so it is fun to experience those together as part of being in college.” ■

*Reprinted in edited format with permission of the Asheville Citizen-Times*



## HOW CULLOWHEE BECAME A 10

WalletHub analysts looked at 291 U.S. cities that have at least one NCAA Division I basketball team and used seven metrics on which to base its rankings:

- \* number of Division I basketball teams
- \* performance level of team(s) during the past three seasons
- \* number of Division I championship wins
- \* number of regular-season championships
- \* minimum season ticket price
- \* fan engagement (number of Twitter followers, Facebook likes, per capita)
- \* stadium capacity

## WALLETHUB'S TOP 10

1. Chapel Hill
2. Los Angeles
3. Durham
4. Bloomington, Indiana
5. Philadelphia
6. East Lansing, Michigan
7. Lawrence, Kansas
8. Lexington, Kentucky
9. Storrs, Connecticut
10. Cullowhee



## SPEIR BRINGS IN A FAMILIAR FACE AS DEFENSIVE COORDINATOR

By DANIEL HOOKER '01

John Wiley is calling the defensive shots for Catamount football.

John Wiley, a former longtime assistant coach at Appalachian State University, has traded in the black and gold for the purple and gold after being named defensive coordinator by Western Carolina head football coach **Mark Speir MAEd '95**. Wiley brings more than 30 years of coaching experience at a variety of levels to the Catamount football program.

Wiley returns to the familiar mountains of Western North Carolina after spending six seasons in the eastern part of the state at East Carolina.

"John is an experienced coach and a proven winner. We coached together at Appalachian State where John led our defense and was a part of that staff that won three national championships and six Southern Conference titles. He also brings over 20 years of experience in recruiting North Carolina to the position," Speir said.

"It is always comforting to hire a guy you have worked with and trust. John will move in from day one and understand our vision and the expectations for this Catamount football program. He will

be a great representative for Western Carolina University," he said.

During his six seasons as the associate head coach and linebackers coach at East Carolina, Wiley helped guide the Pirates to four bowl game appearances and helped transform ECU's defense into one of the nation's top 40 units in two of his final three years. He was instrumental in producing six all-conference players including three first-team selections, a Freshman All-American and a conference freshman of the year. ■

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## REQUEST FOR A SHAW SHANK REDEMPTION

A story in the winter 2017 edition of this magazine characterized **J.T. Poston '15** as the first Catamount to make the PGA tour. Retired sports information director **Steve White '67**, the walking encyclopedia of WCU athletics, points out that former WCU men's golf team member **Stan Shaw '64** played briefly on the tour in the 1970s while working as a golf pro in Florida. ■

# WOMEN'S SOCCER EARNS NATIONAL ACADEMIC HONORS FOR 11TH TIME

By DENISE GIDEON

The Western Carolina University women's soccer team received the National Soccer Coaches Association of America College Team Academic Award again last year, marking the 11th consecutive time the Catamounts earned the academic accolade. The honor was in recognition of the accomplishments of the team during the 2015-16 season.

From 2005 to present, the Catamount women's soccer program has been a staple on the NSCAA Academic Award list. During the 2015-16 season, the Catamounts, coached by Chad Miller, notched a team 3.50 grade point average to earn its latest appearance on the list.

A total of 893 soccer teams (315 men's squads and 578 women's) from across the United States earned the NSCAA Team Academic Award for exemplary performance in the classroom as a team during the 2015-16 academic year. To qualify for the award, a team must have a minimum GPA of 3.0 or higher for the entire academic year. The team score is determined by adding every player's GPA, then dividing by the number of players.



The soccer Cats' frequent appearance on the list of top academic-achieving teams in the nation provides another piece of evidence of WCU's commitment to the "student" half of the term "student-athlete," said Randy Eaton, director of athletics.

"Our top priority is to offer each and every student-athlete a great undergraduate experience in the

community, in the classroom and on the fields and courts of competition, and to ensure their WCU experience always culminates with a degree from Western Carolina University," Eaton said. "I'm proud of what the accomplishments of the members of our women's soccer program in the classroom say about our commitment to student success." ■

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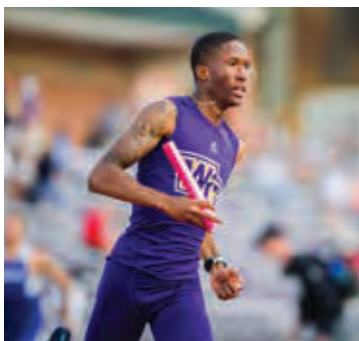
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## MEN'S TRACK TEAM CLAIMS TWO MORE CONFERENCE TITLES

By SEAN FORRESTER

The men's outdoor track and field team (above) celebrates its second consecutive conference championship, thanks in part to the performances of Keion Crossen (far right) and Dakota Lamont (near right).



It's another season, another pair of championships for the Western Carolina University men's track and field team. The squad captured its fourth-straight Southern Conference Indoor title in February in Johnson City, Tennessee, by downing second-place Samford by 15 points. A couple of months later, the team won its second consecutive conference outdoor track and field crown in Birmingham, Alabama, edging second-place Samford by just six points and clinching the title in the final event

of the day, the 4x400 relay.

The WCU women came up just short of winning their third indoor title in the last four years as they fell to Samford by 56.5 points in February, also taking second place in May's outdoor meet when they were outpaced by 51 points by Samford. The championships are the first under first-year head coach **Cale McDaniel '10 MAEd '13**, who served as an assistant coach for many WCU championships in the past.

WCU crowned four individual champions and one relay champion on the final day of the indoor championships including two women's individual titles and two men's individual titles. Sophomore Miles Greer won the competition's Pinnacle Award, which goes to the student-athlete with the highest cumulative GPA on the championship-winning team in each SoCon sport.

In the outdoor events, the Catamount women took home two individual wins and swept the relays while the men had three individual titles and won the 4x400

relay. WCU sophomore Dakota Wright received the men's Pinnacle Award for the outdoor championships. ■





# JOIN THE CATAMOUNT CLUB GREEK CHALLENGE.

## GREEK CHALLENGE.WCU.EDU

A challenge to celebrate the bonds of sisterhood and brotherhood that cross the decades at WCU!

A challenge to build momentum and generate student-athlete scholarship support for Catamount Athletics!

The Challenge is open to ALL members initiated in a CPC, NPHC, or IFC fraternity or sorority at Western Carolina.

The winning sorority and fraternity will be honored at this year's Catamount football Homecoming game, Saturday, Oct. 28, for showing their WCU pride by supporting Catamount Athletics.

### JOIN THE CATAMOUNT CLUB TODAY

Go online at [www.catamountsports.com/catamountclub/](http://www.catamountsports.com/catamountclub/) and join by Friday, October 20, by 5 pm.



2016 Catamount Club  
Greek Challenge Winners

Married couples who are each a member of a fraternity/sorority from WCU will receive credit for his/her organization.

**ALREADY A  
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MEMBER?**

Make sure we know your affiliation by contacting the Catamount Club office to ensure you are included in the Challenge! For more information, please contact the Catamount Club office at [catamountclub@wcu.edu](mailto:catamountclub@wcu.edu) or 828.227.3047.



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## 2017 HOME SCHEDULE

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6:00 p.m.

SEPT. 23



3:30 p.m.

Family Weekend

OCT. 14



3:30 p.m.

OCT. 28



3:30 p.m.

HOMECOMING

NOV. 11



2:00 p.m.

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# THERE'S NO PLACE LIKE HOME

By HOLLY KAYS

## The former Baptist Student Union houses a new program offering a support system to parentless students

On virtually any college campus, they're there — students who have recently exited foster care or who are homeless, wards of the state or orphaned. And most of the time, they're invisible, blending in with the student body at large and keeping their struggles wrapped in a tight armor of privacy. A new initiative at Western Carolina University, however, will reach out and serve those students in a way that no other college in the state is doing.

"It really just fell right into place," said **Keith Henry '85 MBA '92**, chief operating officer of the Baptist Children's Homes of North Carolina. "It was like a puzzle ready to be put together." Called HOMEBASE College Ministry, the program

is headquartered in what was once the Baptist Student Union building, on Central Drive next to the Cullowhee Baptist Church, and funded mainly by the Baptist Children's Homes.

Staffed by a full-time director and equipped with a kitchen, stocked pantry, laundry room and big-screen-TV-equipped living room, among other amenities, it's meant to serve as a home base for students who don't have a home base. It's a place to recharge in the company of people who understand and a place to get help with the things that parents would ordinarily supply — anything from a few extra groceries during a week when money is tight to help figuring out what to wear to a job interview.



Wednesday game nights are one of the HOMEBASE activities organized by Jim Dean (standing).

“Next year, I want to see the outreach and advocacy really come to life,” said **Sophia Calhoun** ’17, who was a student leader in the effort. “I think this building is the best way to do it. I want to have speakers. I want to give a student panel where high school students come and ask questions. I want people to start knowing this building is on campus. If that happens, we’ll see more students from our population that we didn’t even know were here.”

## HELPING THE FORGOTTEN

When Lowell Davis, assistant vice chancellor for student success, came to WCU four years ago, it was with the desire to serve the students on his new campus who didn’t have family support. He’d seen the need during his previous job at the University of Alabama and quickly found himself wrapped up in the problem of addressing it.

Davis’ involvement at Alabama started when a student from the Presbyterian Home for Children in Talladega showed up at the administration building one summer. He wasn’t supposed to enroll until the fall, and he had absolutely no resources to start life on his own. “He needs housing, he needs classes, he needs a meal plan, he needs all these things and he has no one to guide him on what to do,” Davis recalled.

Davis worked with him to find housing and enroll in summer classes. He gathered donations from his local church. And then he started thinking. “I began to ask how many other students are on our campus who are very similar to him,” Davis said. “They’ve aged out of foster care, they show up on our campus and they have to figure out what to do.”

That led to what became a full-blown community program that drew support from other senior-level university faculty. They partnered with a foundation that offered to support the students, and families in the community volunteered to be paired with students who needed a shoulder to lean on — whether that be someone to call with questions about professional dress or how to fix a car, a place to stay over Christmas break when the dorms are closed, or someone to provide a home-cooked meal when the grocery money runs out.

Davis saw the results. That first student, the one who showed up out of the blue from Talladega, is now working for a Fortune 500 company. His sister, who followed him to Alabama, completed a term with Teach for America and is now working full time. “I came to WCU realizing I had a passion for helping the forgotten students,” Davis said.

There were plenty of them to be helped. During the fall 2016 semester, Davis counted 103 students who fit the criteria. Initially, he followed the same blueprint he’d developed at Alabama — generating a list of financially independent students, sending out invitations and holding a meeting.

“The needs were a little different than Alabama,” Davis said. One of the first requests was always for more counseling support, and students also wanted an adult confidante they could trust, like a parent. Then, of course, financial support and help with necessities like food and books and medication.

Calhoun became a member of the group early on. The students dubbed themselves RISA — Resilient Independent Student Association — and began to meet regularly, hanging out for bowling and movie and pizza nights. “For a long time,

Annie Soonah shares a light moment with other students at a “Telling Our Stories” program.



we stumbled over that ‘what do we want to do’ aspect of it because we didn’t know,” Calhoun said. “Is this going to be a group that someone asks you when we need 20 bucks, or is this going to be a group that does something?”

Eventually, the students decided they wanted to be an advocacy group and began to plan what is now a yearly event — “Telling Our Stories.” The students get up on stage, in front of university officials, Board of Trustees members and loved ones they’ve personally invited, and they tell the long versions of what has happened in their lives. It’s a somber event that doesn’t seek to shield audience members from the full force of the stories. It seeks to make them understand.

For Calhoun, who became an orphan at the age of 13, the experience was emotional and cathartic in a way she hadn’t expected it to be. At one point in her story, she cried. Usually, when sharing her past with someone, she peppers the tale with jokes and lighthearted comments to make it easier on the listener. “In that case, I had to see what the weight of a story would do without relieving the pressure,” she said.

### CREATING THE FOUNDATION

With RISA thriving, and Davis’ job responsibilities increasing, Davis reached out to Henry to see if Baptist Children’s Homes might be able to help. “Really, it was a no-brainer,” Henry said. “These are the children who grew up in the system, they were part of the foster care system, and now they’re on their own and they need a family. That’s what we do.”

And, he had an idea. A WCU alum, Henry knew that the Baptist State Convention had an underutilized building on campus. So he called John Butler, executive director of the convention’s business services group, and asked for the building. “It’s rare that you call somebody and ask them for a building, but he said, ‘Probably.’ So we met the next day at that building,” Henry said. “He drove up from Cary and basically handed me the keys and said, ‘Have at it.’”

The Baptist Convention also put in \$25,000 to start

renovations, and the Baptist Children’s Homes put in another \$75,000, with ongoing expenses to total \$100,000 per year. Gifts from Phil Drake, a WCU trustee from Macon County, and the Community Foundation of Western North Carolina also contributed, and WCU placed a couple of student workers in the building. With the help of student volunteers and interior design expertise from WCU associate professor Erin Adams, work started last September to haul trash, paint walls, redo flooring, install Wi-Fi and replace furniture.

Opening day was getting close. Henry realized the program would need a full-time director, and he knew who his first pick would be — Jim Dean, a pastor, WCU adjunct professor and foster parent. Dean took the job. “This program is really geared to helping students that have no family or parental support,” Dean said, “but Baptist Children’s Home has also said to me, ‘We’re not checking IDs at the door. If a student needs help, help a student.’”

He’s excited about the possibilities. With the renovated building unveiled last February, the program isn’t expected to fully take off until this fall. However, a nightly schedule of activities already is in place — classes teaching life skills are on Mondays, TED talk discussions are on Tuesdays, game nights are Wednesdays, the Baptist Student Fellowship holds a meal and worship service on Thursdays and movie nights are Fridays.

Coming up, HOMEBASE likely will offer weekend trips and outings. Dean is working with WCU to provide services like addiction support groups at the location, because there might be less stigma associated with walking into HOMEBASE than with walking into a counseling office. Calhoun and Dean both hope to do more outreach to find students who need HOMEBASE and draw them in. Davis’ data indicates that more than 100 such students are enrolled at WCU, but Calhoun is in regular contact with only about 30 of them.

If the model succeeds, it could spread to other schools as well. Henry’s been getting a lot of interest from other universities in the state, but money is always the issue. “Financially, we’re

not in a place where we can do that right now, but it's not out of the question for the future," he said.

## A GROWING POPULATION

The number of parentless students at WCU seems poised to grow. The existence of the program will serve as its own recruiting tool, steering students who fit the population to consider WCU above other schools. And the number of kids in foster care is growing in the state overall, thanks to the opioid drug epidemic.

"We're just seeing families torn apart by this crisis right now, so these kids are in the system and who knows how long they'll be in the system," Henry said. "Sometimes they're in and out pretty quickly. Sometimes when we get them they're with us or in a foster home until they age out. With more kids coming in, there's going to be more coming out the other end."

According to the Children's Home Society of North Carolina, the number of youth aging out of foster care jumped 10.4 percent between 2015 and 2016, the highest jump since data compilation began 16 years ago. In January, 10,722 children were in state custody, according to data from the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. That's up from 8,721 four years ago.

Of former foster kids who attend college, fewer than 10 percent nationwide graduate; more than 90 percent do not. And the resulting low lifetime earnings coupled with the emotional — and sometimes physical — baggage of a troubled past can keep these young adults from realizing their potential, and can even cause them to perpetuate the cycle into which they were born.

With HOMEBASE, the hope is that the students will graduate, life will get better and they'll pass on a legacy of positivity rather than pain. "We hope that the love and care we give them while they're here will propel them on to a better life," Henry said, "and break this cycle they were a part of."



Community support is needed to make HOMEBASE work. For more information, contact Jim Dean, [jdean@bchfamily.org](mailto:jdean@bchfamily.org) or 828.508.0035. Mail checks to HOMEBASE at P.O. Box 2133, Cullowhee N.C. 28723. ■

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Sophia Calhoun '17 is among the student leaders in the effort to assist students without parents.



Taking part in the HOMEBASE ribbon-cutting ceremony are (from left) Baptist Children's Homes CEO Keith Henry '85 MBA '92; Michael Blackwell, president of Baptist Children's Homes; WCU Provost Alison Morrison-Shetlar; Lowell Davis, assistant vice chancellor for student success; Jim Dean, HOMEBASE director; and Susan Belcher, WCU first lady.

# DIVERSITY DIALOGUES



BY MORGAN  
MARLON W.  
E.  
BILL STUDENC WPA 10



## WCU takes steps to improve the campus climate on issues of race and inclusion

Perhaps it was inevitable that simmering racial tensions sparked by a spate of police shootings of black men across the U.S. and fueled by a contentious presidential campaign emerged at Western Carolina University during the 2016 spring semester. The rise of the Black Lives Matter movement and the pro-police counterpart Blue Lives Matter, angry rhetoric directed at Hispanic and Muslim immigrants, the growth of the alt-right faction and a resurgence of student activism on campuses nationwide were a perfect storm, combining to spawn a racially charged atmosphere.

In Cullowhee, the catalyst for heightened tension was a display of student-created posters in the Department of Intercultural Affairs designed to draw attention to the issue of police brutality toward African-Americans. Some students took offense, expressing support for law enforcement via social media posts. Those posts inspired other students to write sidewalk chalk messages showing pride in their various cultures and ethnicities, which in turn led to strong – sometimes racist – posts on a social media platform that allows users to remain anonymous.

As part of ongoing efforts to improve the campus climate on issues of race, diversity and inclusion, the university scheduled several open discussions throughout the 2016 spring semester. Among the suggestions arising from those discussions was the need for training for faculty and staff on how to talk about tough issues with other members of the campus community, which led to summer and fall workshops.

In addition, after studying the campus climate for much of the 2016-17 academic year, a joint task force on racism, chaired by faculty member Kathleen Brennan, made recommendations to WCU's administration focused on the need to prioritize diversity and inclusion on campus, and the desire for additional educational opportunities related to diversity and inclusion. During a task force forum this past April, Chancellor David O. Belcher reminded the campus community that WCU "...is not alone in grappling with the issue of racism."

As evidence of what Belcher has characterized as a commitment to "WCU as a vibrant, inclusive and diverse institution," the university hired its first chief diversity officer, Ricardo Nazario-Colon, last spring. That position, however, had been in the works long before the tensions of 2016; Belcher announced in August 2014 an "enhanced, in-it-for-the-long-haul commitment to diversity" that would include the budget-neutral creation of a position to lead campus diversity efforts.

For predominantly white WCU, such efforts are becoming critical in the face of dramatic demographic shifts among high school graduates. Nationally, demographers predict that the number of Asian high school graduates will increase by 41.28 percent between 2013 and 2027, while Hispanic graduates will increase by 36.29 percent, American Indian/Alaska native by 12.33 percent and African-American by 4.49 percent. Conversely, the white/non-Hispanic segment will decrease by 11.11 percent.

As the diversity of the campus inevitably increases, the university has an opportunity to expose students to cultural differences that will make them more effective employees and leaders in the global job market, Nazario-Colon said. "It is important to assist all of our community members in navigating not only this institution but also the communities that we are preparing our students to join. In the end, regardless of our differences, we are all part of the same community, both locally and globally," he said.

"Yes, our campus is not immune from racial, political or ideological discord. But, with an emphasis on ensuring an inclusive living and learning environment, WCU is a welcoming place for all, a place that is leveraging the power of diversity to enhance the productivity and intellectual personality of all members of our campus community," he said.

*In the pages that follow, members of the WCU campus community share their perspectives on race, diversity and inclusion, in vignettes compiled by Marlon W. Morgan.*





### **Clifton Price '09**

*Graduate school: School counseling*

*Hometown: Hickory*

While attending WCU as an undergraduate, **Clifton Price '09** said he never personally encountered any mistreatment as an African-American. He views his experience in Cullowhee as inspiring.

“At WCU, I learned so much valuable information. I gained a sense of hope for humanity,” Price said, recalling a day one of his white friends joined him in Brown Cafeteria. “We were casually eating lunch and my friend looked at me and said, ‘Thank you, Clif.’ I was confused, and asked my friend to explain. He said, ‘Clif, I thank you for changing my views of black people.’” Price was still perplexed.

“He went on to explain that, before meeting me, he was extremely prejudiced toward people of color. He also explained that, for his entire life, he was taught it was perfectly fine to judge a person of color before getting to know them. So, he thanked me for changing his views,” Price said. “I felt empowered and saddened at the same time – empowered because I broke through a barrier, but sad because I knew there were millions of other people like my buddy who wouldn’t have that breakthrough.”

While his campus experiences were mostly positive, Price did witness disturbing events, including a dead bear that was found near the Catamount statue with two Barack Obama campaign posters on its head. He also remembers a noose being discovered in Brown Cafeteria. Off campus, Price said he was treated differently by mechanics and at restaurants, grocery stores and elsewhere.

“My experience has been one of difference, injustice and pain,” Price said. “But, it’s also been one of resilience, endearment, triumph and success. My experiences have led me to be courageous, to be empathetic and to be loving, because I’ve seen the alternative. I’ve been down that road. And in order for us to grow as a society, we have to open up our hearts and love a lot more than we already are. We need to look at each other and accept the differences that we see. It’s perfectly fine to be different, but it’s not OK to be treated differently.

“My story has been one of many obstacles I’ve had to overcome, and I’ve overcome them. I want people to know that it doesn’t matter what your circumstance may be. You have the power to overcome. You have to find what makes you go. WCU taught me so much and I’m extremely thankful for having had the experience to be a Catamount. There’s a reason I went back to WCU for graduate school.”



### **Antonio Corza '16**

*Graduate school: Finance and accounting*

*Hometown: Statesville*

As a Latino graduate student in the finance and accounting program at WCU’s Biltmore Park instructional site, **Antonio Corza '16** views himself as a role model to current and future Latino students.

Corza is a first-generation college student. Both of his parents are from Mexico, where they completed only elementary school “because they didn’t have the money to pay for school,” Corza said. After coming to the U.S., Corza’s parents worked hard to ensure that their children would have the opportunity to go to college.

“They always told us that school is important,” he said. “They wouldn’t let us work at all because they wanted us to focus on school and not get distracted by anything else. When I graduated from high school, it was not only my moment, but also theirs because they worked hard for me to stay in line.”

Although diversity is increasing at WCU, Corza said he often is the only one in his classes. Still, he wants to help pave the way for others. “I feel privileged and blessed to be in a classroom. Even though I’m often the only Latino student, I’m going along with the trend, leaving stepping stones for the next students to come,” he said.

“I can talk to Latino students in the undergrad program and be like a role model to them,” he said. “I can be like that point person to talk to and answer any questions they might have. Latinos can relate to each other.”

Corza said he has been treated fairly both by his classmates and his professors throughout his time at WCU. “My professors are motivating me to do bigger and better things,” he said. “I don’t feel like I’m treated any less as a Latino student.”



## **Erica McCurdy**

**Year:** Sophomore

**Major:** Undecided

**Hometown:** Raleigh

Erica McCurdy is technically in the majority as a white student at WCU. But because she prides herself on having friends from various ethnicities, McCurdy often finds herself in the minority.

For instance, when she joined WCU's Inspirational Gospel Choir last year as a freshman, McCurdy was one of just three white members in the mostly African-American choir. Growing up Catholic in Raleigh, McCurdy was definitely out of her comfort zone.

"At first, I didn't know if I was going to be able to sing gospel music," she said. "I had been singing in school choirs my whole life. I didn't know if I was going to fit in. But I loved it. It's just been so interesting to learn. They're like, 'You don't know this song? I learned this song in church when we were like 4 years old,' and I'm like, 'I'm brand new to this.'"

Growing up in schools where white people were in the minority, McCurdy took advantage of opportunities to learn about other cultures. "I feel like I've gained the respect of a lot of people through that," she said. "I'm trusted for that and it's always been a part of who I am as a leader. I was the student body president at my high school. I feel like I got that role because people trusted me, because I knew where everyone was coming from."

McCurdy also feels like her relationships with minorities have helped influence other white people. "I don't hang around that many white people. When I do, they ask me, 'How do you know those things? Do you just ask them, because I don't know what to say?' I say, 'You just have to keep yourself open and not make it sound accusatory or like you're just too ignorant to actually understand.' I think I definitely have opened a lot of eyes," she said.

McCurdy encourages other white people to get out of their comfort zones, like she has done by joining WCU's choir. "One of the biggest things my mom asked me was, 'Are there any other white kids in there, Erica?' I said, 'Actually, there's a few. I thought I was going to be the only one.' There's more people coming in. I think we have a pretty diverse group. It's interesting that we all come together for this one thing," she said.



## **Jacob French**

**Year:** Senior

**Major:** Business law

**Hometown:** Reidsville

After attending a marching band symposium for high school students in 2012, Jacob French knew he wanted to attend WCU. Today, as a member of the Pride of the Mountains Marching Band, French is in charge of running that summer symposium.

Prior to enrolling, French told his mom he was going to WCU strictly for an education. But it didn't take him long to realize he was going to learn far more outside of the classroom than inside.

Growing up in rural Reidsville, French discovered in eighth grade that he was gay, but he kept it to himself. Shortly after arriving at WCU, members of the band made him feel comfortable enough to share who he really was. The first person he told was former drum major **Brandon Truitt '16**, who also is gay.

"He kind of knew, and he just made me feel comfortable," French said. "We hung out, and one day I trusted him enough to actually tell him I'm gay. He helped me come out to other people. It made me feel more comfortable coming out to my brothers in my fraternity. My brothers have been so accepting. That's why I haven't been really scared to tell other people."

French said that Cullowhee is a place where he feels safe and at home. "(Reidsville) is where the more negative reactions come in, which is why I don't really go home," French said. "I always stay at Western, even over the summer when I'm not in school. I just love being at Western and the positive vibes this campus puts out."

French now finds himself in the supportive role Truitt once held. French has been instrumental in helping other gay students at WCU navigate their way. "I've helped plenty of people accept who they are," he said. "That's why I feel like I was meant to be at Western. I found my help, and I feel like it was my turn to help others. It's something I definitely enjoy doing, just advocating for equality everywhere."

"I'm not ignorant to the fact that not everybody on campus is going to be accepting. That's kind of what college is. College is a smaller version of the rest of the world. Everybody has different ideas and opinions. That's just something you live with and don't let that bring you down," French said.



## **Jenifer Montoya Velasquez**

**Year:** Junior

**Major:** Criminal justice and biology

**Hometown:** Hickory

Among the first things Jenifer Montoya Velasquez noticed when she arrived on campus is the lack of fellow Latino students. That's why Velasquez joined the Latino Appreciation Student Organization, giving her a support group. Joining LASO is just what the first-generation student needed to blossom. Velasquez, a junior, joined other organizations and is now president of LASO.

"As a freshman, I was not the person I am now," she said. "I've grown tremendously with my leadership skills. Being involved in organizations has allowed my leadership skills to flourish. It has really brought me a lot of awareness about the problems we have on campus and around the world."

Velasquez and her family moved to Hickory when she was 4. Her mother owns a cleaning business while her stepfather owns a lawn-mowing company. A criminal justice and biology major, Velasquez realizes the opportunity she has.

"I have to do this to have a better life, because I've seen the struggles," Velasquez said. "I've seen what it looks like in Latin countries where there's poverty, school is not even an option and you have to go to work. I'm really appreciative I had the opportunity to come here to have an education."

Velasquez said she has found WCU to be a place where students can express different ideas and beliefs. But her encounters with white students haven't allowed her to affect awareness of Latinos the way she has seen happen with other minorities.

"With other minorities, we learn that we are much more similar than we are different. At the end of the day, we're all struggling and we're all in the same pool. Just because you're Hispanic and just because you're black doesn't mean we're different. We're all fighting the same struggles and oppressions that we have today in society," she said.

"What I can take away from being at Western is to stand up for who I am and for my culture, to not be afraid to speak up for who you are and what you believe in. Honestly, coming here has allowed me to step out of that comfort zone and develop those skills," Velasquez said.



## **Keiara Isom**

**Year:** Junior

**Major:** Biology

**Hometown:** Charlotte

Growing up in Michigan and Charlotte, Keiara Isom was accustomed to being in diverse environments. When she graduated from high school, it would have been easy to follow her friends to colleges with diverse populations. But Isom wanted a different experience. So, she left the city for the mountains of WCU.

Isom has found predominantly white WCU to be very accepting of minorities overall. She has noticed the curiosity of some white counterparts, particularly when it comes to her different hairstyles. "It seems weird, but it's also funny that they're interested in why my hair is straight one day and super curly the next day," Isom said. "It's something I think is normal, but others think it's fascinating."

While she has enjoyed many positive experiences as a minority at WCU, there have been negative occurrences, such as racially charged chalk writings during the 2015-16 academic year.

Discussing that situation with white peers often left her feeling uncomfortable. "It was kind of awkward," Isom said. "I'm a biology major so, in most of my classes, I may be the only African-American student, or the only African-American female, so everybody was kind of asking me my opinion and how I felt. I had no problem expressing it, but I just kind of felt like the odd person sometimes."

Isom said those incidents brought African-Americans at WCU closer together. It also was a learning experience for her. "It wasn't like we were trying to be violent, or anything like that. We were just supporting each other. A lot of the chalkings were harsh, and they did hurt some people's feelings. For me and some of my African-American friends, it was more about being there for each other more than we were in the beginning," Isom said.

"For the people who were asking how I felt about it, they wanted information. They wanted to be educated. I guess it made me feel important. If they didn't care, they would have never asked."



## **Kiara Hines**

**Year:** Senior

**Major:** Social work

**Hometown:** Rutherfordton

For Kiara Hines, coming to WCU was no different than attending a predominantly white high school in Rutherfordton. It wasn't until the campus discord surrounding the 2016 presidential election that Hines felt discomfort.

"Last year, there were a lot of chalkings around the middle of campus," Hines said. "I worked as a tour guide, so I had to try to explain that everyone has a right to freedom of expression, but obviously there was a lot of concern about the things they saw. It made me question the character of some of the students."

Hines said a lot of the opportunities she's had at WCU have come while being one of a few minorities. Last spring, she went to the National Conference on Undergraduate Research in Memphis. Hines said she was one of about three African-American students selected to attend from WCU.

"We're not always well-represented on campus," Hines said. "But I feel like the (minority students) who are here do a lot. If we weren't here, I feel like the campus would be a lot different."

There is one thing Hines would like to see change on campus. "I would like white people to be more understanding and not be so quick to judge people," she said. "We adapt because we're used to adapting, but it would be nice if white people would try to change instead of always wanting things to be modified for them."

As president of the Inspirational Gospel Choir, it's one of the few times on campus when Hines gets to be in the majority. The choir has three white members, but Hines said she would like to see it become more diverse.

"I think it's saying we're trying," Hines said of the white members. "I think we're trying to be more cognizant. It's going to take some time. I think because of where we are geographically, not everybody is accepting right away. But I think we're addressing it and we're taking some steps in the right direction."



## **Aaron Alexander**

**Year:** Senior

**Major:** Marketing and entrepreneurship

**Hometown:** Shelby

Whether he agrees with them or not, Aaron Alexander doesn't have a problem with people speaking their minds, as long as they abide by one simple rule. "I feel like everyone should be able to express their views, whether it's the College Republicans or the Black Student Union, as long as they stay respectful of everyone," Alexander said.

There were several incidents on the WCU campus during the 2015-16 academic year when that didn't happen. One that stands out most to Alexander occurred during a Black Lives Matter silent protest that he attended.

"There was a student, I think he was a freshman, and you could tell he was totally against it the whole time," Alexander said. "He said, 'Gorilla Lives Matter,' instead of 'Black Lives Matter.' I just really couldn't believe he said that. I felt like it was important to let everyone know that it did happen and stuff like that continues to happen every day. As white people on a predominantly white campus, we shouldn't pretend that doesn't happen."

It was a rude awakening for Alexander, who attended a predominantly white high school in Shelby, but had never witnessed racial tensions like he did that year at WCU. "I grew up around African-Americans playing sports," Alexander said. "For the most part, we got along and treated each other the same. I feel like with the political race, it just kept building and building and building."

Fortunately, Alexander said, the campus has returned to normalcy since the election. But the racial tensions definitely served as a learning experience for everyone, he said.



### Channa De Silva

#### Associate professor, bioinorganic chemistry

After completing postdoctoral research at Pacific Northwest National Laboratory, Channa De Silva was looking for a position where he could teach and conduct research at the undergraduate and graduate levels. De Silva found the balance he was seeking at WCU, joining the faculty in 2010.

A native of Sri Lanka, he had concerns about the small number of international faculty members at WCU and low percentage of Asians in the area. "At that time, there were probably 10 to 20 (international faculty members) out of 200," he said. "My daughter started going to kindergarten. She was the only Asian student in the whole class. Even nowadays, even though it's growing a little bit, I went to her sixth-grade honors reception and I was the only one with this (skin) color."

But overriding factors led De Silva to WCU – the weather, mountains and friendliness of the faculty. Not only was his interview process smooth, but he was touched that people remembered him when he returned to start working.

"I also like that I have support from the faculty members," he said. "If I have to use an instrument, if I don't know anything about it, everybody will jump in and show me how to use it. And when they find research opportunities, they will forward them to me. They helped me to get students in the beginning."

He attended college in Sri Lanka before heading to the University of Arizona to earn his doctorate. Although the landscape at Arizona is more diverse than at WCU, De Silva said being a minority faculty member at WCU has its positives.

"Students are curious about my culture," he said. "I can start a conversation with a student. If I don't have a topic, we can talk about food or things like that. I have played music at the International Festival. Every year, they invite me to play Sri Lankan or Indian music. I really enjoy that. I consider that a service to the university."

De Silva also answers questions and gives advice to international students. "Even though I'm not an international specialist, I can advise and talk to them like a faculty member and give them options on what to do and what not to do," he said.



### Enrique Gomez

#### Associate professor, astronomy and physics

One of the appealing things about teaching at WCU for Enrique Gomez was the ability to reach a large population of first-generation students. Gomez was looking for a university where he could teach introductory physics and astronomy while utilizing some of his innovative techniques.

Although WCU is a predominantly white campus, Gomez, who is biracial (white mother, Mexican father), looked forward to teaching African-Americans and a growing Latino population. "I grew up navigating between two cultures," Gomez said. "At times in my life, I felt I thrived more when I helped people from another culture. I lived at the intersection of many identities."

Although conversations about diversity don't naturally occur in physics and astronomy, Gomez tries to integrate elements from non-Western and non-European teachers into his classes. "I believe minorities have something to say about physics, mainly because of particular concerns with the environment, as well as making science accessible to a large audience," Gomez said.

Gomez said when he earned his doctorate, he was the only Latino with an astrophysics degree graduating that year in the U.S. Those numbers are increasing, and Gomez would like to see more Latino faculty members at WCU. "It is isolating," he said. "Sometimes I wish I had another person that I could speak Spanish with more often."

In addition to his activities at WCU, Gomez works with K-12 students in local communities where Latino and Asian populations are growing. "I had a Latino student that I encourage at Fairview Middle School in preparing her for the astronomy event in the Science Olympiad. She did very well. I was very proud of that. Little things like that can have quite an impact," Gomez said.

As president of the Jackson County NAACP, Gomez is believed to be the first Latino to lead a North Carolina branch. In that role, he looks to support a broad movement. "I believe we are still trying to integrate into our notion of 'country' the sons and daughters of slaves and native people, and recent immigrants," Gomez said. "We have a lot of unfinished business, which I thought by this time and my age would have been superseded."



## Jane Adams-Dunford

### Assistant vice chancellor, student affairs

It didn't take Jane Adams-Dunford long to be sold on moving from Oklahoma to WCU. Her husband also was open to the idea. It was her oldest son, a football and basketball player, who needed convincing.

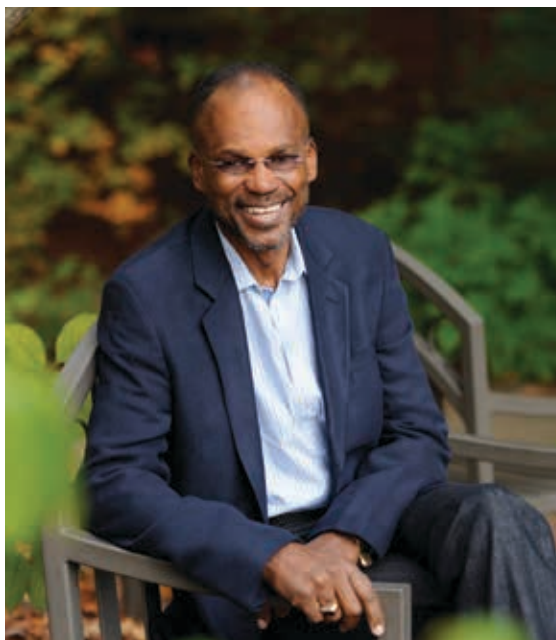
At family meetings as they discussed pros and cons of moving to the mountains, Adams-Dunford showed her son Cullowhee's location on the map. "When I pulled it up on the map, he said, 'The pro scouts aren't going to be able to find me. It's not on the map, mom,'" she said. "I said, 'It's that dot right there.' We laugh about that to this day."

That was in 1998. Her children are now adults and Adams-Dunford loves the area. But that doesn't mean there weren't issues and concerns along the way. "There were the regular concerns – where do we get our hair cut, will the kids have teachers that look like them," she said. "There were the rebel flags. My boys hadn't been exposed to that. But they had a really firm and grounded knowledge of who they were as far as their black history and what it meant to be a black male. They were confident and knowledgeable from that perspective, and being a part of a campus community with amazing students was so helpful in their transition to the Wheel."

One of the things Adams-Dunford appreciated during her interview process was the time set aside for her to speak with other African-American faculty and staff so they could address her concerns. In time, she assimilated into the community through serving on the Cullowhee Valley PTA, Smoky Mountain High School athletics booster clubs and youth sports organizations.

During her time at WCU, Adams-Dunford, a native of Shelby, has seen WCU's number of African-American faculty members shrink, something she believes could negatively affect the student experience. "It is my hope that we continue to be more intentional in our efforts to recruit and retain faculty and staff of color," she said.

"Students of color have shared that they miss not having an African-American faculty member. I truly believe that it promotes your self-esteem, your ability to engage and be comfortable in your learning environment when you see someone who looks like you," she said. "There are commonalities for sure, but our experiences make us different. After all, it is the people that make Western such a special place."



## Kofi Lomotey

### Bardo Distinguished Professor

Kofi Lomotey arrived at WCU in 2013 as the John and Deborah Bardo Distinguished Professor of Educational Leadership. During the interview process, he was impressed by the people he met and excited about WCU's doctoral program in educational leadership. But Lomotey, an African-American, couldn't help but notice the limited diversity of WCU's faculty and student body.

"There was one other African-American faculty member who was full-time, and she had been denied tenure, so that was her last year," Lomotey said. "There was a similar concern with regard to the student population. I know it's difficult in that part of the country, that part of the state, to attract both a diverse faculty and a diverse student body."

WCU does face challenges in attracting faculty of color, said Lomotey, who commutes to campus from Atlanta because he prefers to live in a major metropolitan area. Last fall, the university had seven black faculty members, 10 Hispanic faculty and 23 Asian.

"A prospective faculty member of color does research on Western Carolina, or comes in and interviews at Western Carolina, and they don't see very many people that look like them. That's a red flag. Just a simple thing like an African-American woman being concerned about where she can get her hair done, or being concerned about African-American churches."

Lomotey is proud that his program has one of the most diverse faculty groups on campus, with two African-Americans and one Asian, as well as gender orientation diversity. "The program has three African-American students in its most recent cohort in the doctoral program. That's the most we've ever had," he said.

Nevertheless, Lomotey said a more diverse faculty is beneficial, not just for African-American students, but all students. "For many of our students, this is their first experience on a college campus. For African-American students, if they don't see anybody that looks like them, they might not envision the possibility of becoming a professor," he said. "When you have a diverse faculty, you have diversities of opinions and views and perspectives on the curriculum, and on life in general. That's important for all students." ■



# GWY CHEROKEE

## COMMUNITY. CULTURE. CONNECTIONS.

BY GEOFF CANTRELL

When it came time to select a new interdisciplinary learning theme, Western Carolina University didn't need to look far. The heritage and tradition of a proud people permeate the very ground upon which the university is built. Thus the selection of the 2017-18 theme of "Cherokee: Community. Culture. Connections."

An interdisciplinary learning theme fosters campus conversations and connects students with collaborative opportunities for an integrated campuswide experience. For the past seven years, WCU has selected a learning theme for such reasons. This marks the first time that faculty, staff and students were able to vote on a topic. Of the six choices, "Cherokee" received nearly a third of the votes. The 2015-17 theme of "Africa! More than a Continent" ended at the conclusion of the spring semester.

In announcing the selection, **Carol Burton '87 MAEd '89**, associate provost for undergraduate studies, said the learning theme "will afford us an opportunity to really dig in and not just articulate better our relationship with the Cherokee, but build on it, enhance it and, more importantly, educate our students and faculty and staff about the Cherokee and this beautiful place where we are and its importance."

The tribal and demographic context for the theme of "Cherokee" will be largely in keeping with WCU's neighbors, the Eastern Band of Cherokee Indians, and the portion of their ancestral home that they still retain, the Qualla Boundary. During the Indian Removal of 1838, the Cherokee who owned

lands largely in present-day Swain and Jackson counties as a collective – with the deeds held by a white "chief" – were not forced to leave their homes, while others evaded capture by hiding deep in the Great Smoky Mountains. Today, the Eastern Band is a federally recognized tribe, and the 57,000-acre Qualla Boundary and numerous land parcels in Cherokee and Graham counties is a sovereign nation, with its own government, judicial and law enforcement system, schools and more than 15,000 enrolled members.

"The Cherokee people have a very rich history in Western North Carolina, some of it right here on our very own campus, something that many folks are not aware of," said Lisa Bloom, chair of the learning theme steering committee and the Jay M. Robinson Distinguished Professor of Educational Technologies. "Even more importantly, they have a thriving culture that contributes in so many ways to our lives in the region. My hope is that, through the campus theme, our students, faculty and staff will explore the rich culture and heritage of the Cherokee people, understand and appreciate their contributions both past and present, and make connections with the Cherokee community."

The title photo above shows a detailed portion of Judaculla Rock, a large boulder near the WCU campus covered in elaborate petroglyphs and revered by the Eastern Band of Cherokee Indians.

The ties between WCU and the Eastern Band are indeed deep and historic. WCU's Cherokee Studies Program, with both undergraduate and graduate degrees, is renowned for its curriculum in the culture, language, history, health and environment of Cherokee and indigenous issues. The Sequoyah Distinguished Professorship in Cherokee Studies, fully funded in 1998, is currently held by Brett Riggs, a research archeologist who has worked with the Eastern Band on projects since the 1990s. In 2016, the university signed a memorandum of agreement with the Eastern Band and two Oklahoma-based Cherokee tribes to continue its commitment to the academic study and promotion of Cherokee language, history and culture.

WCU also is a lead partner in the ongoing Cherokee Language Revitalization Project, an initiative to provide broader, more comprehensive training and learning opportunities. For example, Project Songbird, a collaboration with the Eastern Band's Kituwah Preservation and Education Program, recorded original songs in the Cherokee language. Another example is the work with the New Kituwah Academy, a Cherokee immersion school, where **Bo Lossiah '05**, curriculum, instruction and community supervisor, has been a leader in those efforts. Last year, the preservation and education program and WCU's Cherokee Language Program worked with the WCU Print Shop to create card games for learning Cherokee pronouns, as well as a Cherokee language board game created by WCU graphic design students. The games were given to Hunter Library's Special Collections and the New Kituwah Academy.

"New Kituwah Academy is a multifaceted school, so our first goal is a quality education for the children," Lossiah said. "Preservation of our language is important, too, though, and must be considered a part of that quality education. As our instruction has evolved, we've found conversational Cherokee is a good beginning for learning. Our challenge has been finding volunteers to come in and speak with the students and share life experiences. There are maybe 230 Cherokee speakers now, with 80 percent older than 60, I'd estimate. That really shows the importance of this instruction and Western's support. Younger students get immersion lessons in Cherokee, older students get dual language."

The WCU Cherokee Center, established in 1975, serves tribal and nontribal residents of the Qualla Boundary and the surrounding communities by improving educational opportunities. "We want to bring as much of Cherokee to WCU as we want Western to come to Cherokee," said **Sky Sampson '10**, recently appointed center director and an enrolled tribal member. "I think we can make connections back and forth with so much we have planned and things under consideration, and there are so many WCU alumni in Cherokee and the Qualla Boundary."

One of the many events in which the Cherokee Center will be involved during the learning theme is a two-day solar eclipse celebration in August. In partnership with the Eastern Band, the Cherokee Historical Association and the Museum of the Cherokee Indians, the center will host events based around the nearly two minutes of total darkness beginning at 2:35 p.m. Monday, Aug. 21, making the town of Cherokee a probable prime viewing location. The astronomic phenomenon was described by the ancient Cherokee as when a giant frog that lived in the sky had swallowed the sun, causing darkness to occur during the daytime. The Cherokee would gather and beat drums and make noise so as to frighten the great frog away, allowing the sun to shine brightly again.

Also during the year, WCU's Central Hall, a residence for some 300 students, will be rededicated as Judaculla Hall to commemorate the university's historic connection to the Eastern Band and to acknowledge the unique heritage and



From top to bottom: Board games created by created by WCU graphic design students and produced by the university's Print Shop help teach the Cherokee language to students at the New Kituwah Academy, a Cherokee immersion school.

An archaeological field school explores Cherokee heritage on campus in a dig supported by the Eastern Band of Cherokee Indians' Tribal Historic Preservation Office and the N.C. Office of State Archaeology.

Exhibits at the Fine Art Museum will support and enhance the campus learning theme, such as Bernadine George's ceramic two-handled pot that is featured in "Ancient Forms, Modern Minds: Contemporary Cherokee Ceramics," on display through Friday, Nov. 10.

“We want to bring as much of Cherokee to WCU as we want Western to come to Cherokee.”

—Sky Sampson '10



history of the Cherokee people. According to Cherokee folklore, all of campus and the surrounding Cullowhee Valley was once the earthly home of a giant, Judaculla (Tsu la ka la), a powerful hunter with slanted pupils in his eyes who could traverse the mountains and the spiritual realm with ease. Judaculla Rock, a large boulder linked to the legend that contains some of the best preserved and most significant petroglyphs east of the Mississippi River, is located south of campus.

Indian artistry, crafts and dance will be a significant focus of “Cherokee: Community. Culture. Connections.” The WCU Fine Art Museum is hosting “Ancient Forms, Modern Minds: Contemporary Cherokee Ceramics,” which features the work of 11 Cherokee artists such as **Joel Queen '05 MFA '08** and Davey Arch and brings together historic and contemporary pottery techniques, through Friday, Nov. 10. The museum also will host a national traveling exhibit, “Return from Exile: Contemporary Southeastern Indian Art,” from Aug. 21 to Friday, Dec. 15, with more than 30 contemporary Southeastern Native American artists working in a variety of media including painting, drawing, printmaking, basketry, sculpture and pottery. A symposium on the exhibit will be held Nov. 10.

Signature campus events throughout the academic year will highlight Cherokee connections to the region and the university. Mountain Heritage Day, scheduled for Saturday, Sept. 30, always has carried Cherokee elements, such as stickball games, as part of the cultural festival. Organizers are planning for expanded and highlighted roles this year. The 16th annual Spring Literary Festival will include a Cherokee theme day. The eighth annual Rooted in the Mountains symposium, a collaborative gathering that seeks to integrate indigenous and local knowledge with health and environmental issues, will continue narratives of Native American culture. Other events to be scheduled are a Cherokee language symposium, a cultural immersion trip and a tentative campus “pow wow.”

“We’re super excited about this opportunity, especially since the overall population at WCU selected Cherokee as the next theme,” said Sampson, WCU’s Cherokee Center director. “Those results give me a personal sense of pride in knowing that others are reaching out to learn more about our people and our culture. We can’t wait to see what’s in store for the coming year within this fantastic collaboration.” ■

# BELOVED BEGINNING

Cherokee elder Jerry Wolfe receives an honorary doctorate

BY GEOFF CANTRELL

To kick off Western Carolina University's yearlong campus learning theme focused on "Cherokee," perhaps nothing could have been more appropriate than an honorary doctorate bestowed upon tribal elder Jeremiah "Jerry" Wolfe during May's commencement exercises.

The 92-year-old Wolfe, a D-Day veteran, teacher, community leader, storyteller and artist, accepted the honorary degree by inviting audience members to sing along to a hymn of deliverance, his voice in Cherokee and theirs in English.

*U ne hla nv i u we tsi*  
Amazing grace

*I ga go yv he i*  
How sweet the sound

*na quo tso sv wi yu lo se*  
That saved a wretch

*I ga gu yv ho nv*  
Like me

Chancellor David O. Belcher called Wolfe "a cherished living repository of his tribe's wisdom," whose efforts have enriched the cultural landscape of Western North Carolina, the state and nation.

"You have served with exemplary distinction and dedication throughout your life as a member of your community and as a conservator and icon of Cherokee language and culture," Belcher said. "You have been a tradition-bearer for the Eastern Band of Cherokee Indians, preserving and teaching the Cherokee language, stickball traditions, knowledge of plants and traditional medicine, myths and legends, and oral history."

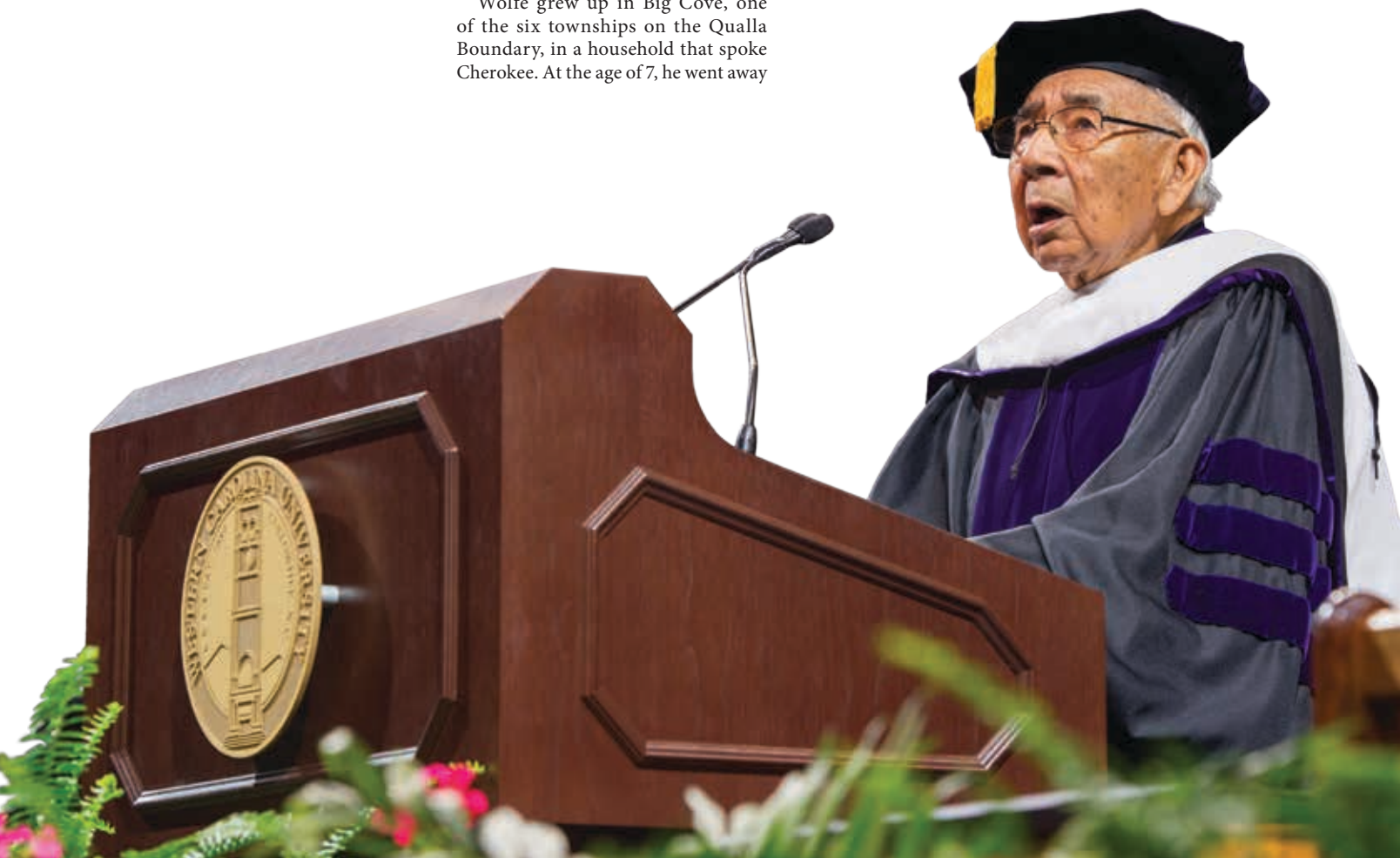
Wolfe is an integral and valuable asset for WCU, with a decades-long list of activities and involvement ranging from interviews for the award-winning documentary "First Language – The Race to Save Cherokee" to serving as a panelist at a Native American Heritage Expo event on campus, participating in chancellor installation ceremonies and taking part in Mountain Heritage Day. When WCU calls, he answers.

Wolfe grew up in Big Cove, one of the six townships on the Qualla Boundary, in a household that spoke Cherokee. At the age of 7, he went away

to boarding school where speaking his native language was strictly forbidden. He left after completing the 10th grade to join the U.S. Navy during World War II, where he survived the Normandy invasion as a landing craft operator, taking infantry ashore at heavily contested Omaha Beach. After the war, he returned home, started a family and was an instructor at the Oconaluftee Job Corps for more than 20 years.

Since 1997, Wolfe has worked at the Museum of the Cherokee Indian, where he has shared his extensive knowledge of tribal history and culture with thousands of visitors. Over the years, he also has presented programs on those topics across the state and Southeast and has been interviewed and featured in many publications and video productions.

The honorary doctorate goes along with many other awards, including a 2010 Brown-Hudson Folklore Award and the tribal title of "Beloved Man," an honor so rare it had been more than 200 years since the last male designee. ■



# VOLUNTEER VENTURES

By **TERESA KILLIAN TATE**





## Alumni, Students and Faculty Are Making a Difference – and Making Friends – Through Their Work with the Peace Corps

**Sydney Blair '16** captured mosquitoes in Great Smoky Mountains National Park as part of her field work for a Western Carolina University course in which environmental health students help track mosquito species and the diseases they can carry.

Now, Blair serves as a Peace Corps volunteer in Uganda working to prevent the spread of malaria, a disease transmitted by mosquitoes that is responsible for hundreds of thousands of deaths worldwide each year. When Blair visits Ugandan schools, she talks about the benefits of testing for the disease and early treatment. She takes an insecticide-treated bed net to show what she urges everyone in Uganda to sleep under, even in thatched-roof huts. She helps members of the Bed Net Brigade youth club learn how to go into villages, educate others about malaria prevention and demonstrate how to hang and care for bed nets.

"I hope that families will see the children taking initiative with the nets and follow suit," she said.

Blair is one of 94 WCU alumni who have served in the Peace Corps since its founding in 1961, according to 2016 Peace Corps data. Launched by the U.S. government to promote world peace and friendship, the Peace Corps receives thousands of applications from people who want to volunteer, and selection can be competitive. In September 2016, the Peace Corps had 7,213 volunteers and trainees but received more than 23,000

applications over the course of the year. "We want to match the most highly qualified candidates with the positions that are right for them," said Emily Webb, public affairs specialist for the Peace Corps East Region Office.

Peace Corps deploys volunteers to help community members abroad develop sustainable solutions to challenges in agriculture, community economic development, education, environment, health and youth development. Volunteers train for three months and commit to serve for two years. In exchange, they receive medical and dental care, transportation to and from their country and enough money to live on in the communities they serve.

Today, the Peace Corps volunteers serve in 65 countries, with nearly half of volunteers in Africa and the next largest contingents in Latin America, Eastern Europe and Asia. Last fall, WCU alumni serving in the Peace Corps were based in Uganda, Ethiopia and Guatemala.

The work can be fulfilling, with opportunities to help, meet new people, learn a new language and culture, and find adventure. The experience also can be emotionally and physically challenging, said Blair and other Peace Corps volunteers connected to WCU.

In addition to working in school-based malaria prevention educational outreach, Blair chairs a malaria prevention think tank that offers educational programs, training and resources

**Ada Sloop '15** (facing page) displays the dreamcatcher she made for her Peace Corps host family. **Sydney Blair '16** (above) visits a Ugandan school to share information about malaria prevention.





Sydney Blair '16 works with mothers and infants at a clinic in Uganda (above). Teawan Gausi '11 (third from left) is a Peace Corp volunteer in Guatemala.

to Peace Corps volunteers and their counterparts who want to implement activities at their sites. She also is working on programs such as sack gardening, a method in which tall grain sacks are filled with dirt and seeds to form a vertical garden that produces vegetables even during the three- to four-month dry season.

A significant part of her work is serving as one of five staff members at a health clinic. On Tuesdays, when mothers bring their babies for vaccinations, Blair helps weigh the children and complete their immunization cards. Among the most difficult moments for her was seeing an HIV-positive orphan whose life depended on urgent treatment for a knee infection but whose caretakers could not afford to go to a hospital. Another was witnessing a 15-year-old give birth in the health clinic without family or friends there for support. "I have seen that happen several times," said Blair. "There is no way to prepare yourself for those kinds of things."

A native of Wilkesboro, Blair said her experience has helped her to be more patient with herself and more thoughtful about what is important in life. The people she has met are so appreciative and welcoming that even when meeting for the first time they will invite her in for tea. "Time in Uganda is not like time in the United States," said Blair. "People walk everywhere. Everything is at a slower pace, and people appreciate everything so much more. It is just a different world that's been really hard to explain to friends and family back home."

For **Teawan Gausi '11**, navigating cultural differences and perceptions to make connections with people in her community has been critical to carrying out her work as a Peace Corps volunteer in Guatemala. Gausi, who earned degrees in psychology and sociology at WCU, is charged with helping young people learn life skills to lead healthier lives, teaching them about substance abuse prevention

and reproductive and sexual health, and expanding their leadership skills. Sometimes, community members do not understand what the role of a Peace Corps volunteer is, or exactly what she is there to do. "The challenge is bridging the gap," said Gausi.

Gausi seized the opportunity to be a volunteer when she saw a program at Indiana University, where she is pursuing a master's degree in public administration, that linked coursework with Peace Corps service. She became particularly interested in development work after a two-week WCU summer travel course to Kenya in 2010 led by Anthony Hickey, professor of sociology, and Nyaga Mwaniki, retired anthropology faculty member. The class stayed in the Taita Hills and studied development issues while working with Kosmos Solutions International, a nongovernmental community development and humanitarian organization. Three alumni of the Kenya service learning trips have gone on to

serve in the Peace Corps, said Hickey.

Service-learning experience at WCU also was meaningful for **Ada Sloop '15**, an environmental health graduate who left in June to serve as a Peace Corps volunteer in Uganda. Sloop was in a course taught by Lane Perry, WCU director of service learning, centered on service and leadership. The students traveled to New York and helped repair homes damaged by Hurricane Sandy. Afterward, she continued to be involved as the service-learning officer for WCU's chapter of the American Society of Safety Engineers. She encouraged participation in activities such as roadside and river clean-ups. After graduation, while completing an air quality internship in Cherokee, she saw photos of a classmate serving as a Peace Corps volunteer that rekindled her interest in the possibility.

"I thought, 'Wow, that really is something I would like to do,'" said Sloop. Further fueling her interest was what she remembered hearing about the experiences of Phil Kneller, a retired WCU environmental health professor who worked to help eradicate smallpox while serving as a Peace Corps





volunteer in Ethiopia, and conducting research in a class taught by Brian Byrd, WCU associate professor of environmental health. She applied for Peace Corps community health educator positions and was selected for a position centered on preventative health measures related to malaria, HIV/AIDS, maternal child health and hygiene.

Perry said he was not surprised Sloop went on to serve in the Peace Corps. Service is in WCU's DNA, and students who come to the university with a passion to serve graduate as informed, highly active and committed servant leaders, he said. "It is when these two elements align that WCU helps produce the balance between heart, culture, service, knowledge and leadership that produces a Peace Corps volunteer," said Perry.

What Sloop, who grew up on a dairy farm near Statesville, was most looking forward to is immersing herself in a new culture. She was excited to live with a host family and made them a dreamcatcher as a gift before she left. "It's important to find spiritual connection with my host family, and dreams are a good way to do that," said Sloop.

Sloop said she looks forward to her experience serving and to returning with Peace Corps on her resume. "Everybody in the United States is going to know what Peace Corps is," said Sloop. "They have a history. They have success stories. They have a foundation."

Jim Lewis, WCU professor emeritus of history, was among the second group of Peace Corps volunteers to work in Venezuela in 1964. Lewis lived in a two-room cement block house in a village of about 300 people. Electricity was available several hours a day, and the roads were mud. He volunteered at a school and helped establish credit union services in a rural coffee-growing region.

"The thought was this would mainly benefit people who had no access to banks or for whom banks were not interested in opening accounts with \$5 or \$3," said Lewis. "We started with \$200 in the credit union, and when we left two years later we had \$50,000."

The experience led him to shift his research focus from European to Latin American history, which he taught at WCU while on the faculty for more than three decades.

Another former Peace Corps volunteer on WCU's faculty, Barbara Jo White, professor of computer information systems, initiated the World Map Project for the Peace Corps. While

a volunteer in the Dominican Republic in 1988, she realized paper maps would not last in that country's rainy, humid climate, so she and two students painted a world map on a school wall. She developed a grid method to create the map to scale that is now part of a manual to help volunteers worldwide replicate the project.

What faculty and staff members share with students about their personal experiences abroad and in the Peace Corps offers students insight into being citizens of the world. Byrd said seeing former students such as Blair and Sloop go on to tackle global health issues, especially as Peace Corps volunteers, is inspiring. "It is often said that 'environmental health affects everyone, everywhere and every day,'" said Byrd. "We expect our graduates will make a difference wherever they are in the world. Ada and Sydney are shining examples of what our alumni are trained to do. They were not the first, and they will not be the last." ■

Faculty member Barbara Jo White (above) and students work on the World Map Project. Ada Sloop '15 (below) enjoys a Western North Carolina hike before her departure to Uganda as a Peace Corps volunteer.





## GRIDIRON ODYSSEY

### GEOFF COLLINS' CIRCUITOUS CAREER JOURNEY LEADS FROM CULLOWHEE TO PHILADELPHIA AS HEAD COACH AT TEMPLE

By STEVE WHITE '67

Odysseus, the central character in Homer's eighth-century classic the "Odyssey," survived 10 years of arduous travel to reach his destination. The circuitous journey of football coach **Geoff Collins '94** has been less dangerous but more than twice as long, with 11 stops between Cullowhee and his current home in Philadelphia.

Collins, a starting linebacker for Western Carolina University (1991-92) and the Catamounts' defensive coordinator for four seasons (2002-05), was introduced as the head football coach at Temple University this past December. Ironically, he replaced Matt Ruhle, who now directs Baylor University's football program and served under Collins at WCU as a defensive assistant coach. Temple is coming off a landmark 10-4 season in which the Owls won the American Athletic Conference championship, was ranked 23rd nationally and played in a bowl game.

Collins was a member of WCU legend Bob Waters' last recruiting class in 1989 out of Rockdale County High in Conyers, Georgia. A walk-on, he was awarded a scholarship after his freshman season. He recorded 191 tackles in his last three seasons as a Catamount and was a key defensive player on the 1992 team that was five points short of going undefeated in the Southern Conference, was nationally ranked the last three weeks of the season and defeated Marshall, the NCAA I-AA national champion.

According to his teammates, coaches and those he worked with in his chosen profession, the coaching trait was detected early in Collins' DNA. **Steve Hodgin MAEd '83**, WCU's head coach during Collins' final three seasons, said "...he was like a coach on the field, always prepared as he constantly watched film, had a high football IQ, made adjustments on the fly and helped his teammates do the same."



**Tom Bodine '95**, a WCU Athletics Hall of Fame inductee and the Catamounts' all-time leading tackler, and Collins were teammates for two seasons. "The younger players would follow his work ethic, and we learned a lot about how to play the game," Bodine said. "As a graduate assistant coach, Geoff had a unique talent for understanding what the opposing offense was doing. We knew he would be a great coach."

**Mark Speir MAEd '95**, WCU's current head football coach, was a young assistant coach during Collins' junior and senior seasons, and coached with him in the 1993 and 1994 seasons. "Geoff was a very focused, intelligent player who played hard and physical and was a leader on and off the field," Speir said. "There are natural football players and there are those like Geoff, who loved the game and worked hard to be great. That's why he is where he is today."

Hodgin launched Collins' career in 1993 by awarding him a postgraduate scholarship to serve as an assistant on WCU's defensive staff. Collins' first full-time position was at Fordham in 1996. That was followed by stints at Albright (Pennsylvania) and Georgia Tech (1999-2001) before he returned to Cullowhee as defensive coordinator for four seasons alongside then-head coach **Kent Briggs '79 MAEd '81**. Collins made a second stop at Georgia Tech in 2006, followed by positions at Alabama

(2007), Central Florida (2008-09) and Florida International (2010) before becoming defensive coordinator at Mississippi State for three seasons, where his 2014 unit was the nation's best "red-zone" defense.

Collins spent the past two seasons at Florida as defensive coordinator, and last year's squad was ranked in the nation's top 10 in total defense and scoring defense. He became known as the "Minister of Mayhem" around the Southeastern Conference for his aggressive defenses. Sixteen Collins-coached players have been drafted by NFL teams.

Jim McElwain, his boss at Florida, said Collins is "a relentless recruiter that can motivate players and understands the game on both sides of the ball." Nick Saban, Alabama's legendary head coach, calls Collins "a very intelligent football coach who brings an extraordinary amount of positive energy and enthusiasm to his job."

Collins credits his time at WCU for preparing him for his coaching career. "I knew in high school I wanted to be a college football coach, and Western Carolina put me on that path," he said. "WCU will always be special to me and my family, as that is where I was given my first opportunity to go after my dream and is where I met my wife." Collins and his wife, the former **Jennifer Haynes '96**, are the parents of an infant daughter, Astrid.

When asked if Philadelphia might be the final stop on his odyssey, Collins laughed and said, "I'm having a blast being a head coach with all that comes with it – recruiting, developing a game plan for winning games and championships, and graduating young men."

Who knows the answer to that question, but keep in mind that Odysseus was thought to have made a stop in the ancient Turkish city of Philadelphia on his way home. ■



Geoff Collins '94 leads his Temple team in preseason practice (left) and enjoys a moment with his wife, the former Jennifer Hayne '96, and daughter Astrid.

## CLIMBING WCU'S FOOTBALL COACHING TREE

Western Carolina University has an impressive list of alumni and former football players who are currently coaching at the collegiate and professional levels. Listed alphabetically are the Catamounts, in addition to Temple head coach **Geoff Collins '94**, who are in active NCAA and NFL coaching positions, including the years they competed at WCU and current position.

**Fran Brown '05** (2003-05), assistant head coach, Baylor

**Chris Collins '11** (2006-09), safeties coach, Georgia State

**Joe D'Alessandris '77 MAEd '79** (1973-76), offensive line coach, Baltimore Ravens

**Lonnie Galloway '94** (1990-93) co-offensive coordinator, Louisville

**Mitch Hall '03** (1999-02), running backs coach, Presbyterian

**Blake Harrell '02** (1999-02), defensive coordinator, The Citadel

**Paul Johnson '79** (1975-79), head coach, Georgia Tech

**Brian Rucker '04** (2000-03), wide receivers coach, The Citadel

**John Scott '00** (1995-98), defensive line coach, Arkansas

**Lamont Seward** (2000-03), associate head coach, West Alabama

**Clyde Simmons '96** (1982-85), defensive line coach, Cleveland Browns

## THAT MCCANTS-DO SPIRIT

### A SOUTH CAROLINA PARK RANGER EARNS NATIONAL RECOGNITION FOR HIS LEADERSHIP AND SERVICE

By CHRISTY MARTIN '71 MA '78

When Poinsett State Park rangers are working outdoors, the office answering machine tells callers “It’s a great day in South Carolina!” The cheerful message adds to the warm, welcoming atmosphere inspired by **Thomas “Zabo” McCants ’99**, park manager for the past 10 years.

For his leadership and exemplary service, McCants earned the 2016 Park Ranger of the Year Award in a national competition. Sixty rangers from across the U.S. were nominated for the award, sponsored by Servicewear Apparel, a Nashville, Tennessee, company that provides work uniforms worn by rangers, law enforcement officers and other public agency employees across the nation.

Poinsett State Park is in Wedgefield, South Carolina, well off the beaten path to tourist destinations. Despite its remoteness in the midlands, the park has grown in popularity and recreation opportunities under McCants’ leadership, while preserving its natural environment and historic heritage. Opened in 1936, the park is a 1,000-acre expanse including more than 300 species of flowering plants, shrubs and trees, and featuring forests with hiking and biking trails, campgrounds and cabins.

McCants, who lives at the park with wife Amanda, has worked hard to make improvements. He increased mountain biking trails from 4 miles when he arrived to more than 25 miles today, recruiting local volunteers to help. Campgrounds were refurbished. The 81-year-old cabins built by the Civilian Conservation Corps have been made more comfortable. The modernized park has wi-fi, a gift shop and ice cream.

Quick thinking by McCants during natural disasters kept visitors out of harm’s way and saved park properties. In 2015,

when heavy rains were forecast, he drained the park pond, an action that prevented surrounding areas from flooding when 16 inches of water fell over a three-day period. During 2016’s Hurricane Matthew, residents evacuating the coast sought shelter inland in park campgrounds. When trees began falling in high winds, McCants moved everyone to safe areas.

In all of the park’s successes, McCants praised its employees. “A leader may set the pace, but it takes a good team to keep it going,” he said. “We have pushed through some hard times together, always trying to keep a positive attitude and stay focused on goals.”

He has special memories of WCU and its parks and recreation management faculty. “I hold my WCU education close. I learned a lot about the qualities of good leaders from Maurice Phipps, who was a leadership counselor in a way. Ben Tholkes told cool stories about a park ranger’s life that made me want to follow this career path,” he said. At that time, parks and recreation management majors wore T-shirts that read, “Know what you know and know what you don’t know.” The words belonged to Paul Petzoldt, a top mountaineering expert, and McCants uses them when training new employees.

Jim Burnett of Servicewear praised McCants as most deserving of his company’s honor, saying, “He embodies exactly what we had in mind in creating this award.” On hand for the ceremony were more than 50 rangers from park districts in the mountain, sandhills, lake and coastal regions who know McCants. In writing his nomination of McCants for the award, fellow ranger Brad Lane said, “He loves his park and, more than that, he just loves being a park ranger.” Visitors who meet McCants never forget him, Lane wrote. ■



## ON LOVE AND LOSS

### A MOTHER HONORS THE MEMORY OF HER LATE SON BY HELPING OTHERS NAVIGATE END-OF-LIFE SITUATIONS

By CHRISTY MARTIN '71 MA '78

**Dianne Barrett Gray '84** of Naples, Florida, came to WCU in 1980 to study sport management, which was then a new program. "I'm a pioneer by nature, so it was great to take part in a program where professors encouraged us to think outside-the-box while in a participatory learning environment," Gray said.

That pioneering spirit also led Gray to do statistics work for school and professional baseball teams during spring training as a teen, even though the roles were not then thought of as female-oriented. "I loved and still love math and science, and the physics of sport fascinated me, even as a kid," she said. At WCU, Gray's expertise led to a student assistant job with **Steve White '67**, longtime sports information director. Gray kept stats for baseball, football and basketball, wrote press releases, had a sports-centric radio show, was a referee for intramural sports and started the student sport management club. "Dianne has a great personality and knew how to talk with people. It was obvious that she could have a good future in the sports field if she wanted it," said White, now retired.

But, as happens for many, life

turned on a dime when, 12 years after she graduated, Gray's healthy 4-year-old son Austin was diagnosed with neurodegenerative brain iron accumulation disorders, which month-by-month took away his ability to walk, move, eat, talk or see clearly, while leaving his cognitive abilities intact.

"As much as I had hoped for a cure, it became evident one would not be found in time to save my son. Eventually, I had to tell him that though doctors worked hard every day to find a cure, there was not one...that we would do everything we could to keep him as pain-free as possible and that he was loved beyond measure," she said. A core part of the journey with her son and healthy baby daughter was an immense deepening of her faith, which became the bedrock of many conversations with Austin, who died in 2005 at 14.

Throughout the journey, Gray saw the best and worst within the health care system. She saw a need for improved communication between providers and families, and a need for improved pain management. Additionally, her experience gave her a profound empathy for the dying and the grieving. In 2010,

she founded Hospice and Healthcare Communications, which builds business collaborations and projects that help seriously ill patients and families. She also owns a speakers' bureau and works with thousands of people annually on a one-to-one basis, helping them to find resources, as she crosses the globe as a speaker, journalist and researcher.

"I try to do what I can, where I can, to help make life better for people. It's not about saving people. It's about reducing emotional, physical or spiritual suffering where possible," Gray said.

Gray also serves as president of the Elisabeth Kubler-Ross Foundation, named for the iconic psychiatrist who authored "On Death and Dying," which Gray studied at WCU. Gray continues to write for books, gives inspirational keynotes on palliative care research and does frequent TV and radio interviews. Her latest collaboration is with Olivia Newton-John, Beth Nielsen Chapman and Amy Sky for the "Liv On" album, which features songs about healing, grief and hope. Most important to her, though, is the message she shares with all: "While life may end, love lasts." ■

**Dianne Barrett Gray '84** crosses the globe as a speaker, writer and researcher on dying and grief.

# class NOTES



## FORGING ONWARD

Blacksmith **Brock Martin '10** has yet to make his coolest thing...or has he? Martin was a recent contestant on the History Channel's hit show "Forged in Fire." His episode was part of Season 4 and aired in May. Martin advanced to the final round before finishing in second place. The show pits four bladesmiths against each other, making various blades and weapons in timed elimination rounds until a panel of judges declares a winner.

An entrepreneurship major, Martin applied for the show and found out he was selected this past spring. A self-described "bad procrastinator," Martin said it was tough competing under a clock, but making weapons is right up his alley. "I really enjoy making weapons," he said. "I do all kinds of blacksmithing and decorative iron, but I mostly make historical and fantasy weapons."

Martin started blacksmithing about 10 years ago. Growing up, he was always interested in it, but didn't think it was a practical skill. It wasn't until he came to WCU and began working with others at the Jackson County Green Energy Park in Dillsboro that he realized blacksmithing was something he could do for a career. Now a full-time blacksmith in Hickory, he often returns to the Green Energy Park to teach and inspire a new generation of blacksmiths. "What I enjoy most about blacksmithing is your ability to improvise," Martin said. "You can make anything and you can work around a lot of things. It's just such a versatile craft. I think that's what draws me to it most."

Martin's episode of "Forged in Fire" can be seen at <http://www.history.com/shows/forged-in-fire/season-4/episode-6>. ■

## 1949

At the age of 97, **Luther Bailey MAEd '53** is one of WCU's oldest alumni. Bailey attended Western Carolina Teachers College in the late 1940s, during a time of dramatic transformation on campus as soldiers returned from World War II. An Army Air Corps veteran of the 334th Bomb Squadron, he vowed at the end of the war never to fly again and kept his pledge until 2010, when he joined other veterans on an Honor Air flight to the World War II Memorial Monument in Washington, D.C. Bailey taught fifth and sixth grades at Old Fort Elementary School for many years. He lives at Mars Hill Retirement Center.

## 1958

**Dee Thompson Smith** of Cherokee and her four daughters will compete in the state finals table tennis competition of the North Carolina Senior Games in Raleigh in September. The family qualified for the finals during games held in May at the Jackson County Recreation Center. Smith's daughters are **Jan Smith '78**, **Kathi Littlejohn '86**, Laura Smith and Karla Reed. She taught physical education and elementary art at Cherokee Elementary School for 24 years.

## 1966



**Jean Dowell**, retired athletic director and longtime head women's basketball coach at Mount St. Joseph University in Cincinnati, Ohio, has released an album of vocal

recordings, "A Place Way Back in Time." The album was recorded and produced with Cincinnati musician Mike Oberst. Dowell is a former star women's basketball player at WCU. A member of WCU's Athletics Hall of Fame, she averaged 30 points a game in 1965-66 for the university's first nationally affiliated women's team.

## 1974

**Lanny Peters**, pastor of Oakhurst Baptist Church in Decatur, Georgia, retired in April after serving for 28 years. A native of Lexington, Peters was formerly a teacher and counselor in North Carolina schools. He earned his master of divinity degree at Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary and doctorate

of divinity at Columbia Theological Seminary.

## 1976

**Brenda Kay Ledford MAEd '79** received the Paul Green Multimedia Award from the N.C. Society of Historians for her blog, "Blue Ridge Poet." Ledford was honored for her efforts to collect and preserve Appalachian history.

## 1977

The National Football League's Baltimore Ravens hired **Joe D'Alessandris MAEd '79** in January as offensive line coach. D'Alessandris also has coached in the NFL for the Buffalo Bills, Kansas City Chiefs and San Diego Chargers. He was a three-year starting guard on WCU's men's basketball team, where he was voted team captain and most valuable player his senior year. D'Alessandris immediately broke into coaching after graduate school and in his 40 seasons has worked at nine universities, the Canadian Football League and World League (later NFL Europe), in addition to the NFL.



After three decades of service to public radio audiences in Western North Carolina, **Dick Kowal MME** retired in April as music director of WCQS-FM radio. An accomplished musician who

plays multiple instruments, Kowal joined the station in 1986 just as it was getting started. An Asheville native, he was selected for the Asheville Symphony as a young high school student and also played with the Howard Hanger Jazz Fantasy and the Appalachian Brass Quintet. He taught trumpet and audio production at UNC Asheville. \*

## 1979

Works by mixed-media artist **Dick Roberts** were on exhibit at Acme Art Studios in Wilmington in January. Roberts was formerly a curator of exhibits at the Science Museum of Charlotte (now Discovery Place).

## 1980



A book authored by **Larry Clark EdS** of Morganton won a historical book award from the N.C. Society of Historians. Clark's book, "Tawodi: Cherokee of the Blue Mountains Confront Spanish

Conquistadors," also was nominated for the Sir Walter Raleigh award for fiction and the Clark Cox historical fiction award. "The Last Conquistadors," another historical work by Clark, also was nominated for literary awards. Clark is dean emeritus of Western Piedmont Community College.

## 1981

The N.C. Coastal Federation honored **Laura Jane Richardson Price MAT '03** of Morehead City with the 2016 Pelican Award for her contributions as a volunteer. Price's activities for the federation range from bagging oyster shells and planting marsh grasses to weeding vegetables and removing marine debris from coastal waters.

## 1982

**Kevin Johnson** of Mooresville retired after a career of 30 years in the Iredell-Statesville school system teaching physical education at all levels, from elementary through high school. Johnson continues to serve as a substitute teacher and works for Pro Skills Basketball Select, a youth basketball development organization.

## 1983



Longtime South Carolina graphic designer **Gil Shuler** was featured in a story in the Charleston Post and Courier in November 2016 about his work to create new visual identities

for many of the city's commercial, municipal and nonprofit enterprises. His business, Gil Shuler Graphic Design, was described as the center of Charleston's design community.

## 1984

**Derrick Harding MA '85** of Miami, Florida, has published a memoir of his experiences since being diagnosed with acute leukemia. Harding's book, "Two Years Journey, the Rise from Leukemia and Aneurysm to the Opportunity of a Lifetime: Healed Survivor," chronicles his hospitalization and the solace he found in his religious faith. He is a native of Hanover, Jamaica.

## 1986



**Jeff Coghill MA** co-edited a book, "Developing Librarian Competencies for the Digital Age," with Roger G. Russell. Coghill serves as director of the Eastern Area Health Education Center

Library Services and outreach librarian at East Carolina University's William E. Laupus Health Sciences Library.

The Weslaco (Texas) Area Chamber of Commerce named **Doug Croft** its president and chief executive officer. A native of Louisiana who also has lived in Virginia and Indiana, Croft served as head of the Thomasville Area Chamber of Commerce in North Carolina for 27 years.



**Rebecca "Becky" Garland MPA '16** has been named Graham County manager. As the county's chief financial officer since 2009, Garland won praise for her work managing the budget,

which enabled the county to purchase a new building last year with a cash surplus in the general fund. At WCU, Garland achieved an exceptional academic record, graduating from her bachelor's and master's programs with a perfect 4.0 GPA.



Former Catamount football player **David Wagner** is the top prosecutor for South Carolina's 10th Judicial District, which includes Anderson and Oconee counties.

Wagner took office as the district's solicitor in January following a successful bid in the November 2016 elections. A native of Greenville, South Carolina, he earned his law degree at the University of South Carolina.

\* Blue Ridge Public Radio photo by Michael Mauney

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# class NOTES

1987

The name of the accounting firm where **Mike Crawford** is employed as chief operating officer was incorrect in the winter 2017 edition of this magazine. The correct name of Crawford's firm is Dixon Hughes Goodman LLP of Asheville.

**Foy Jenkins II**, previously special operations chief for the Miami-Dade Fire Rescue Department, has returned to North Carolina to become fire chief for the town of Morrisville. Jenkins, who has more than 34 years of experience as a firefighter, is originally from New Bern.



**Scott Thomas** of Sanger, Texas, was recently promoted to federal coordinating officer with the Federal Emergency Management Agency.

Thomas has responsibilities for federal resources and programs during national emergencies and major disaster declarations. He

joined FEMA in 2010 after retiring from the U.S. Army.

1988

A group of senior citizens created a large mural at Brookdale Eden senior living community depicting a beach scene, under the direction of **Elizabeth Boles**, president of the Fine Arts Festival Association of Rockingham County. Boles teaches art classes for seniors living in long-term care facilities. She has painted 59 murals in North and South Carolina and Virginia.

1991

**Chip Chiappini** was one of 821 financial advisers in the U.S. and Canada selected by Edward Jones in May to attend the annual leaders' conference hosted by the company in St. Louis, Missouri. Chiappini, now in his 24th year as a financial adviser, works in the Asheville office of Edward Jones.



**Clay Cox**, a member of the Georgia House of Representatives from the 108th District, hosted visitors from WCU in March at the Georgia state house. The event was a job-shadowing day

for students sponsored by the Alumni Association. Cox previously served in the legislature as a representative for District 102.

1993



**Laura B. Leatherwood MS '96 EdD '07** is the new president of Blue Ridge Community College. Leatherwood, previously vice president of student services at Haywood

Community College, began her duties on July 1. While at HCC, Leatherwood also served as the executive director of the college's foundation, director of institutional advancement and executive director of continuing and adult education. She was named vice president at HCC in 2011.

1994

**Danell Arnold Moses MAEd '00** has been promoted to dean of career technologies at Southwestern Community College in Sylva. Moses previously was a faculty



## A MIRACLE LEAGUE ADVOCATE RECEIVES TOP HONORS

During his career of 20 years as a parks and recreation director in Georgia and North Carolina, **George Page '93** has believed recreation facilities should be made more accessible to people with disabilities. "Children and adults who have special needs are underserved when it comes to these kinds of opportunities," said Page, who since 2011 has been executive director of the Valdosta-Lowndes County (Georgia) Parks and Recreation Authority. "It has been a huge passion of ours here in Valdosta to do something about that." Page has been instrumental in a successful effort to establish a "Miracle League" complex where individuals with mental or physical disabilities can play baseball, regardless of abilities. The complex will have a rubber-surfaced baseball field so that wheelchairs travel smoothly during play. Other features will include a handicapped-accessible playground and a concession stand where people with special needs will have work opportunities. The project has received a \$100,000 grant from the federal Land and Water Conservation Fund and construction is set to begin this year. For his leadership, including his work with the "Miracle League" project and other outstanding accomplishments, Page was named Georgia's top parks and recreational professional for 2017. He received the Distinguished Professional Award in February from the Georgia Recreation and Parks Association. Page's department also won state parks and recreation "agency of the year" honors for its achievements, which range from record-breaking participation in youth sports and successful joint use agreements for facilities located throughout the county to tournaments the agency hosted that boosted the local economy. Prior to his job in Valdosta, Page served as director of parks and recreation in Whitfield County, Georgia, and Brunswick County, North Carolina. ■

member in the business department. She also serves as vice mayor of Webster, where she lives with her husband **Brad Moses '93 MBA '96**.

## 1995

**Kimberly Gold MBA** is the new president of Robeson Community College in Lumberton. Gold, who earned her bachelor's degree at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill and her doctorate at Appalachian State University, was previously executive vice president and chief academic officer at Isothermal Community College in Spindale.



Carson-Newman University selected **Jennifer Hall MA** to receive its Distinguished Faculty Award, the university's highest faculty honor. Hall, a professor in the English

department, joined the faculty in 1995. She also serves as director of the Appalachian Cultural Center.

## 1996



**Clyde Simmons**, formerly an All-American on WCU's football team and a National Football League veteran, has been named defensive line coach of the NFL's Cleveland Browns. A

Wilmington native, Simmons previously held the position with the Los Angeles Rams for five seasons. Before joining the coaching ranks, he played in the NFL for 15 years, beginning in 1986 when he left WCU to join the Philadelphia Eagles. Simmons returned to WCU to complete his degree in 1996. He is a member of the WCU Athletics Hall of Fame.

## 1997

**Samantha Hyatt Cabe** of Chapel Hill was elected in November as district court judge for District 15B, serving Chatham and Orange counties. An attorney for 16 years, Cabe has represented clients in district court in child welfare, family law, juvenile delinquency, criminal/traffic and general civic matters. She is married to **Drew Cabe '98**.



## OLD TIMERS' SOCCER LEGACY ENDURES

The WCU men's soccer program was discontinued more than 30 years ago, but the former players, now in their 50s and 60s, are still winning for their alma mater in several ways. "The old-timers," as they call themselves, host an annual reunion that is a source of pride for having one of the longest-running histories of any alumni group. Former players memorialized two coaches who died of cancer by establishing endowed scholarships for student-athletes. The Charles W. Schrader Soccer Scholarship and the Malcolm Loughlin Soccer Scholarship have far surpassed the \$25,000 endowment level, with a combined total of \$85,000. The continuing support of the old-timers inspired WCU women's soccer program alumnae to follow suit. The KKSBB ("Kappa Kappa Soccer Babes") Legacy Foundational Scholarship, started in January by the soccer alumnae, has raised \$4,520 toward its first-year goal of \$5,000.

The Old-Timers Soccer Reunion traces its history to the mid-1970s when Coach Schrader and wife Myrtle hosted an annual gathering for players. Myrtle Schrader continues to be involved, more than 40 years later. The 2017 weekend event held in early April included a dinner party, golf outing, picnic and coed alumni match at the WCU soccer complex. Reunion organizer **Brad Bradshaw '76** (above) of St. Augustine, Florida, a member of the soccer team for all four of his years at WCU, said the gatherings have reached a period of transition as more women players join the ranks. "The women's soccer alumnae are taking on a more active role," Bradshaw said. "There's a phenomenon happening, and more families, extended families, and former coaches and families are coming." This year, more than 85 people attended the reunion dinner party.

The men's soccer program at WCU that the old-timers fondly remember was discontinued after the passage of Title IX of the Education Amendments Act. The federal law required institutions receiving public funds to offer equal opportunities to men and women athletes. Men's soccer was canceled in 1984 to make room for more women's opportunities. The male players and team alumni were disappointed, but put hard feelings aside and kept getting together for fellowship and to renew ties. When the women's soccer program started in 1999, they gave their full support and welcomed the new alumnae to their annual tradition.

"The loss of the men's soccer program was unfortunate, and it blows your mind to realize how supportive the alumni who played on those teams have been of the women's program," said former women's team goalkeeper **Tina Weaver '04**. "To have that type of commitment, love and perseverance, these men are exceptional and certainly have done more for soccer at WCU than anyone knows." ■



**Joseph Hefner**, assistant professor at Michigan State University, is associate editor of a new journal, *Forensic Anthropology*, to be published by the University of

Florida Press beginning in 2018. The journal's editor-in-chief is Nicholas Passalacqua, WCU assistant professor of anthropology and sociology. The journal

has an international editorial board and is devoted to the advancement of science and professional development in forensic anthropology and forensic archaeology.

**Robin Parton Pate** is serving in the second year of a two-year term as president of the WCU Alumni Association. Pate is head of communications at the Institute for Advanced Composites Manufacturing Innovation in Knoxville, Tennessee.

# class NOTES

## 1998



**Ed Foster** of Greensboro is studying in the MFA program in documentary film at Wake Forest University.

**Matthew Haney MSA '10** was named principal at Etowah Elementary School in March. Haney previously was the assistant principal at Flat Rock Middle School. He has taught, coached and held administrative roles in public schools in Western North Carolina since 1999, serving in Buncombe, Haywood and Henderson counties.

## 2000



**Vincent Castano MA** has been promoted to dean of institutional effectiveness at Fayetteville Technical Community College. Castano served as the department's

director for the past seven years. He previously was director of student services at Central Carolina Community College in Sanford.



**Caroline Wilson Daily** is serving as vice chair of North Carolina's Safer Schools Task Force. Daily was appointed by former Gov. Pat McCrory. An eighth-grade teacher at Riverwood Middle

School in Clayton, she developed the curriculum for a character education program known as the Student Tutoring and Mentoring Program that is being used in schools.

## 2002



**Crystal Olson** has a new job as clinical project leader at R.J. Reynolds in Winston-Salem. Olson designs clinical trials with a goal of helping smokers transition to lower risk tobacco

products or quit smoking altogether. She previously was a clinical research associate for Medpace, the Cincinnati-based clinical research organization, and was a finalist in the 2017 PharmaTimes clinical research associate of the year competition. Olson completed the Boston Marathon in April, a race she ran to raise funds for the American Liver Foundation.

## 2003



**Erin Danielle Anderson Fox** was selected as teacher of the year for South Carolina. Fox teaches English and coaches the girls' cross-country team at Gaffney Senior High School. As 2018 teacher of

the year, Fox will serve as a roving ambassador and provide mentoring, give speeches, work with Teacher Cadets and Teaching Fellows and lead a statewide teacher forum. She received a \$25,000 cash prize and will have the use of a new BMW to drive during her award year.

Former Catamount football player **Mitch Hall** and his wife, Carrie, have a 3-year-old son and a new baby daughter, born Oct. 4, 2016. Hall is assistant football coach at Presbyterian College in Clinton, South Carolina.

**James Hogan** joined Mitchell Community College in Statesville in January as vice president for advancement, with responsibilities for endowment, fundraising and planned giving, alumni relations, and public relations and marketing. Hogan previously served as a major gifts officer at Davidson College. A Statesville native, he previously taught high school English in the Iredell-Statesville school system.

## 2005



**Jennifer Gordon MAEd '08** is working hard to transform a primary school in a rural farming community in the Blue Mountains of Saint Andrew

Parish in Jamaica. Gordon, principal of Woodford Primary and Infant School since 2015, organized a successful literary fair and began seeking corporate sponsors for the school. "We have students who are bright and just want that opportunity to excel, so I am imploring organizations and individuals to do a little bit more – to come out of their comfort zone in the cities and urban areas and come up to the hills, because schools like ours are waiting and ready," Gordon told the Jamaican Information Service News.



Durham attorney **Brandon Robinson MA '10** has been elected chair of the WCU Board of Visitors. Robinson, a former recipient of the WCU Young Alumnus Award, practices in the areas of

constitutional law, real estate and real property, wills and trusts, and corporation and nonprofit law. The board elected **Lisa Hill** of Apopka, Florida, to serve as vice chair. Hill, who attended WCU from 1981 until 1983, is president of Long Farms and co-owner of Southern Hill Farms with her husband, **David Hill '83**. The 30-member Board of Visitors was established in 2014 to function as an advisory board to the chancellor.

**Bill Vespasian MAEd**, vice president of business and finance at Tri-County Community College, is active in a variety of community projects in the Murphy area. Vespasian serves on the board of directors of Hiwassee Valley Pool and Wellness Center, the United Way of Cherokee and Clay counties, First United Methodist Church Foundation, Industrial Opportunities Inc., Murphy Shrine Club and Cherokee Lodge 146.

## 2006



**Carrie Vickery** was sworn in as Forsyth County District Court judge in January. A Rutherford County native, Vickery won the judgeship in the November 2016 elections. She

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earned her law degree from Elon University and joined Holton Law Firm in Winston-Salem in 2009.

**Rachel McMahan MAEd** has retired from teaching after 31 years in the classroom. McMahan, a Black Mountain native, spent her entire career teaching kindergarten through fifth grade in the Owen district's elementary schools.

## 2007

**Matt Dietrich** has moved to Bozeman, Montana, to accept the position of production manager for Simms Fishing Products. Established in 1980, Simms manufactures waders, outerwear and technical fishing apparel at its facility in Bozeman.



**Laura Hensley**, a teacher in the Kenai Peninsula Borough School District of Seward, Alaska, was a participant in Miami University's global field course held in Belize in the summer of 2016. Hensley

studied coral reefs and wildlife and learned about community efforts to sustain them.



**Patrick Kelly MPA '09** of Sanford finished first out of eight candidates in the November 2016 elections for Lee County School Board. The board then elected him as vice chairman. Kelly is assistant director of student

outreach at Central Carolina Community College and serves as an adjunct instructor of political science.

**Kyle McCurry MBA '11**, director of media relations at Warren Wilson College, led a professional development opportunity in April for a group of student videographers. McCurry took the students to the Martinsville Speedway in Ridgeway, Virginia, where they worked on NASCAR's green initiative project, spent time at Fox Sports and met NASCAR drivers. Prior to joining Warren Wilson, McCurry was a reporter for Fox Television in Charlotte, where he covered racing.

**Ben Cutler** has been named one of North Carolina's emerging poets and selected for mentorship in the 2017 Gilbert-Chappell Distinguished Poetry Series. Cutler teaches English and creative writing at Swain County High School in Bryson City. His mentor for the year is Pat Riviere-Seel of Asheville, author of two prize-winning poetry chapbooks.

## 2008



Singer-songwriter **Matt Williams** of Asheville was a featured violinist and received a writing credit for his work in

"Infinity Plus One," an album by Secret Agent 23 Skidoo that won a 2017 Grammy Award for best children's album.

Former WCU point guard **Eric Wilson** is in his second year as assistant men's basketball coach at North Carolina Central University in Durham. Wilson helped lead the team to 25 wins and the second trip to the NCAA basketball tournament in the school's history. The Eagles lost to the University of California at Davis, 67-63, in the First Four in Dayton, Ohio. Wilson previously was assistant coach and director of basketball operations at WCU.

## 2009

**Taylor Howard** is a founding partner and owner of H&H Distillery of Fairview, maker of a dry rum, Hazel 63, that won bronze medals from both the American Craft Spirit Association and American Distilling Institute.



**Brenda Mills MPA**, economic development specialist for the city of Asheville, was honored for her contributions during the YWCA Stand Against Racism program

held April 30. The Martin Luther King Jr. Association of Asheville and Buncombe County and the residents' council of the Asheville Housing Authority sponsored the program. Mills promotes minority business development and is an active community volunteer.



## FORMER COACH CELEBRATES LIFE ON THE COURT

**Jayne Arledge '79**, the longtime women's basketball coach at North Greenville University in South Carolina, has never been far from a hoop. Growing up in Buncombe County in a lively neighborhood of sports-loving kids, Arledge already was perfecting her basketball skills at the age of 10, hoping to play in high school. Basketball was the main sport available to women at the time. Arledge was playing for Enka High School when Title IX became a law in 1972, giving female athletes equal opportunities at federally supported universities. Several years later, WCU's women's basketball team came calling, and she became the first female student in WCU history to receive an athletics grant-in-aid. Arledge played throughout her college years, leading the team to four winning seasons. An honors student, she graduated in 1979 as the team's all-time leading scorer with 1,928 points, a record that still stands. At North Greenville University, Arledge coached the women's basketball team through transitions into the National Association of Intercollegiate Athletics in 1992 and to the National Collegiate Athletic Association Division II in 2002.

Serving for 36 seasons until her retirement earlier this year, she earned a solid reputation as a hard-working coach who made time to get to know her players. "I cared about them personally and tried to treat everyone fairly and with respect," she said. Arledge has decided to stay on at North Greenville University, serving as the senior women's administrator in athletics and physical education instructor. "I feel like I've still got some good years left. I'm not ready to sit on the sidelines yet. I'll probably be sneaking back in the gym sometimes, too," she said. ■



# class NOTES

## 2010

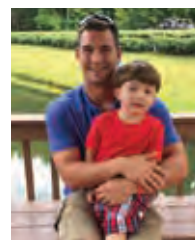


**Cole Bowen** and wife Brittney are owners of a company that salvages old houses, barns, buildings and household junk and turns the items into furniture and home decor. Their

company, Carolina Chic Home Decor and Salvage of Gibsonville, has items available online and at shops in Rural Hall, New Bern and Gibsonville.

**Heather Swayne Klipa MAT '12** was named head girls' basketball coach at Smoky Mountain High School in Sylva after serving for several years as the team's assistant coach. Klipa, who played guard on the WCU women's basketball team, is married to **Tyler Klipa '16**, who teaches physical education and is the strength coach at Smoky Mountain.

## 2011



Former WCU football defensive back **Brett Allen** is a special agent for the Drug Enforcement Administration. Allen is stationed in Washington, D.C., where he conducts criminal

investigations. A graduate of the DEA Academy in Quantico, Virginia, he previously was a police officer for the city of North Charleston (South Carolina) and served in the drug interdiction unit and on the riot and SWAT teams.



**Logan Sherrill** is the new 11 p.m. weekday anchor at WDBJ-7 television station in Roanoke, Virginia. Sherrill previously was at Fox 46 in Charlotte.

## APPALACHIAN TRAIL HIKE RAISES OVER \$80K FOR CHARITY

More than 12,000 hikers have completed the Appalachian Trail, which stretches across 2,189 miles from Georgia to Maine. **Steve Claxton '78** of Robbinsville is among 500 of them who accomplished the feat when they were over the age of 60. Claxton is an avid outdoorsman who had long been fascinated with the idea of an adventure on the "A.T.," as the trail is known. Growing up in Swain County in a family of four boys, he spent his childhood exploring the mountains of Western North Carolina with his brothers. "I think all those years of experience gave me an advantage on the trail," he said. "I've pretty much been in the woods all of my life." A professional outfitter, Claxton often walks at least 10 miles a day, taking visitors to the mountains on fishing and hiking trips through his business, Smoky Mountain Adventures. He was fit and prepared when he started the hike in February 2016, but found it just as physically challenging as expected. "My endurance had dwindled a little as I've gotten older, but I was determined and persistent. I don't like to give up. Age has helped instill that in me," he said. Claxton's hike served as a fundraiser for two youth charities and attracted many donors, which was a major motivation to finish. He had a nickname, "Mustard Seed," a Biblical reference, while hiking on the trail. Except for being trapped in his tent during a terrible storm in the White Mountains, Claxton suffered no mishaps or injuries. He finished the hike in August 2016. The six-month effort has so far raised more than \$80,000 for Big Brothers Big Sisters of Graham County and the Friends of Barnabus Foundation, which aids children in Honduras who have medical needs. ■

## 2012

**Brad Bassinger MBA, Clinton Lawing MBA and Jeremy Balog ME '13** are working together in an online business, UsedEquipmentGuide.com. The site allows buyers of used construction equipment, agricultural equipment, cranes, on-highway trucks, lift trucks, industrial engines and power generation equipment to see the offerings of many websites in a single search. The guide was in the development stages for two years under Balog's leadership.

## 2013

**Alex Edwards MS** has joined the middle school faculty of Tate's School, a private school located in Knoxville, Tennessee, as instructor of science. Edwards is pursuing his doctoral degree in ecology and evolutionary biology at the University of Tennessee.

The New Hanover Regional Medical Center honored **Eric Freeman** in February for his longtime commitment to the care of trauma patients. Freeman, director of the emergency medical services program at Robeson Community College, received the Mike Law Award of Distinction. Freeman has a long history as a first responder and joined the Prospect Fire Department as a volunteer when he was in high school. He started the emergency medical technician program at the Robeson County Public Schools' career center.

## 2014

**Travis Allen MPA '16** was named assistant to the county manager of Scotland County in January. As a graduate assistant at WCU, Allen conducted research on projects related to North Carolina public policy issues. He previously was a right-of-way supervisor for Cherokee Clearing Inc. of Murphy.

Franklin native **Tyler Cook** has written a new book, "Vigilante," the second in his fantasy adventure series that began with "Aluria," released in 2016. Cook also wrote "The One" in 2015 and "A Guide to Historic Dillsboro" in 2014.

**Kayla Myers McMahan** is the new volleyball coach at Swain County High School in Bryson City. McMahan, who served as assistant coach last year, was formerly a star athlete at Swain High, where she played on the 2008 state championship volleyball team and the state runner-up softball team.

## 2016

**Rhett Harrelson** has been named head coach of boys' basketball at Enterprise (Alabama) High School. Harrelson, a 2012 graduate of the school, is believed to be the top scorer in the school's



### TEACHER TEAMS UP WITH NFL STAR ON LITERACY PROJECT

Jackson County teacher **Sandra Brown McMahan '11 MSA '16** (above, right) and Malcolm Mitchell (center), wide receiver for the NFL's New England Patriots, have a special connection. After meeting in 2016, they teamed up to bring an entertaining program about literacy to schoolchildren in Western North Carolina, with Mitchell focusing on reading and McMahan on writing. The story of their collaboration began when McMahan attended a seminar at the N.C. Center for the Advancement of Teaching, where she saw a video featuring Mitchell talking about his struggles with reading. He was a star athlete at the University of Georgia, but his difficulties made it hard to keep up in class. Mitchell eventually went on to write a children's book, play in the Super Bowl and serve as a mentor to young people through a foundation he established, Read With Malcolm. McMahan was moved by Mitchell's story after seeing the video and wrote to him. Mitchell replied, and the two became friends. McMahan also has family ties to Mountain Faith, a Jackson County bluegrass/gospel band that won fame on "America's Got Talent." Several of her family members perform with the band, which is touring nationally. Getting to know Mitchell and his work with the Read With Malcolm foundation gave McMahan the idea to start a foundation involving Mountain Faith called "I Write My Story Inc." The foundation promotes literacy through musical programs with an emphasis on songwriting. "Our hope is to encourage students to create stories, songs and poems, and learn the importance of writing," McMahan said. Mitchell, McMahan and Mountain Faith (including vocalist **Summer McMahan**, above left) presented a program together at Cullowhee Valley School in April. The elementary students heard a talk by Mitchell, were given copies of his book "The Magician's Hat," enjoyed a mini-concert by Mountain Faith and received a journal with blank pages to fill with their own words, courtesy of the "I Write My Story Inc." foundation. ■

basketball history. He also was a standout basketball player at WCU and served as team captain during his senior year.



**Connor Kick** joined the broadcast team at WNCT "9 On Your Side" television station in Greenville in February as a reporter and digital journalist. A native of Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, Kick was a member of WCU's Pride of the Mountains Marching Band and had his own campus radio show, "Inside the Pride." He finds himself working alongside fellow 2016 alumnus **Brandon Truitt**.

Western North Carolina pro wrestler **Trent Weatherman**, known in the ring as "Tracer X," was featured in a WCQS public radio program about wrestling's popularity in the mountains. A middleweight wrestler who has achieved several titles, Weatherman aspires to be picked up by World Wrestling Entertainment Inc. His interview with WCQS aired on March 1.

**Ragan Whitlock** of Newnan, Georgia, has been named editor of Southern Fly Fishing Magazine, an online bimonthly publication that focuses on the sport of kayak fishing in the South. At 22 years old, Whitlock is the magazine's youngest staff member. An avid fly fisherman and licensed fishing guide, he previously was the assistant editor of Southern Trout Magazine.



## FOUNDER OF NUTRITION, DIETETICS PROGRAM PASSES

Barbara Anne Cospers, founder of WCU's Nutrition and Dietetics Program, died May 10 at the age of 72. Cospers came to WCU in 1977 to help fill a gap in educational opportunities for students from Western North Carolina interested in careers in food, nutrition and dietetics. During her 22-year career at WCU, she earned numerous awards for her teaching and service to the region, including membership on the Western North Carolina Health Systems Agency Governing Body, a health planning agency for the westernmost counties of the state. She retired in 1999. ■

## ALUMNI DEATHS

**Connie "C.A." Allison '77**  
April 21, 2017; Kings Mountain.

**Jonathan Britt Amos '06**  
Oct. 16, 2016; Asheville.

**Floyd E. Bateman MAEd '77**  
Jan. 4, 2017; Asheville.

**Ann R. Beatty MAEd '81**  
Oct. 17, 2016; Catawba.

**Charles B. Beaver Jr. '90**  
Dec. 10, 2016; Concord.

**Louis Marshall Black Sr. '63**  
Jan. 5, 2017; Gerton.

**Arlene D. Benfield ME '07**  
Dec. 10, 2016; Morganton.

**William C. Bennett '53**  
Oct. 20, 2016; Mars Hill.

**Barbara C. Bolden '61 MA '67**  
Dec. 29, 2016; Canton.

**Rupert W. Bowen '61 MAEd '63**  
Oct. 15, 2016; Winston Salem.

**Zane "Jack" E. Bowman '82**  
Feb. 19, 2017; Cherokee.

**Mabel M. Brandon '48**  
March 12, 2017; Winston-Salem.

**Sammy H. Brant MAEd '69**  
Feb. 21, 2017; Goose Creek, South Carolina.

**Richard A. Braunhardt '89**  
Nov. 27, 2016; Fort Pierce, Florida.

**Tommy G. Brooks Jr. '62**  
Jan. 2, 2017; Atlanta, Georgia.

**Paula A. Brown '67**  
Oct. 19, 2016; Concord.

**Ida M. Bryson '47**  
Feb. 22, 2017; Cullowhee.

**Jenneane B. Buchanan '53**  
Jan. 9, 2017; Charlotte.

**Thomas L. Buckner '96**  
March 29, 2017; Raleigh.

**Sara J. Bumgardner '45**  
Feb. 20, 2017; Clover, South Carolina.

**Roger D. Burnett MAEd '70**  
Jan. 2, 2017; Honea Path, South Carolina.

**Diane B. Burton '78**  
Jan. 7, 2017; Salisbury.

**Wynona A. Butner '46**  
Feb. 23, 2017; Winston-Salem.

**Randy T. Byerly '80**  
Nov. 13, 2016; Lexington.

**Helen Josephine Cable '53 MAEd '55**  
Jan. 31, 2017; Asheville.

**Karen H. Campbell '61 MAEd '77**  
Nov. 25, 2016; Salem, South Carolina.

**Kimberly D. Carnes '04**  
March 11, 2017; Franklin.

**Ray D. Carpenter '62**  
Nov. 15, 2016; Robbinsville.

**John A. Cheeks '63**  
May 13, 2017; Huntersville.

**Maurice A. Clark '69**  
March 13, 2017; Candler.

**Betty J. Congdon MAEd '64**  
April 4, 2017; Clarkesville, Georgia.

**Jeffrey V. Connelly '87**  
Dec. 29, 2016; Marion.

**Priscilla B. Cooper '62**  
March 20, 2017; Cherokee.

**Lura R. Cormier '84**  
Nov. 5, 2016; Fort Collins, Colorado.

**Fred H. Cothorn '66**  
Jan. 19, 2017; Greensboro.

**William "Billy" J. Crawford '84**  
Feb. 28, 2017; Concord.

**Brainard L. Cummins '74**  
March 17, 2017; Sylva.

**Alice Dalton '99**  
(formerly **Alan C. Sneed '99**)  
Feb. 15, 2017; Black Mountain.

**Paul W. Davis MAEd '62**  
April 1, 2017; Ellijay, Georgia.

**Dennis D. Ensley '58**  
Feb. 7, 2017; Sylva.

**Joyce Hicks Folk MAEd '70**  
Oct. 20, 2016; Bamberg, South Carolina.

**Juanita "Neet" Williams Fornoff '38**  
Jan. 20, 2017; Parkville/Towson, Maryland.

**Paul J. Foster '65**  
Jan. 18, 2017; Leicester.

**Don A. Fowler MAEd '78**  
April 26, 2017; Alexander.

**Thomas C. Franklin '74**  
May 16, 2017; Greenwood, South Carolina.

**John L. Garland Jr. '84**  
Feb. 26, 2017; Robbinsville.

**Deborah N. Ginn '73**  
March 12, 2017; Sylva.

**Linda C. Griffin MA '71**  
March 24, 2017; Pomaria, South Carolina.

**Fred L. Hardin '67**  
April 18, 2017; Warner Robins, Georgia.

**Charles D. Harkins '59**  
Oct. 19, 2016; Asheville.

**Deborah G. Harris '92**  
April 5, 2017; Sylva.

**James F. Harris '57**  
Dec. 1, 2016; Virginia Beach, Virginia.

**Jean C. Heffner MAEd '52**  
Nov. 16, 2016; Bryson City.

**Claudia D. Helms '76**  
May 8, 2017; Mebane.

**Edwin C. Hendrix '62 MA '64**  
Nov. 22, 2016; Murphy.

**Patsy J. Hendrix '63 MA '65**  
Dec. 8, 2016; Murphy.

**Thomas N. Higdon '61**  
April 25, 2017; Las Cruces, New Mexico.

**Sheila W. Hinkle '74**  
Nov. 29, 2016; Hendersonville.

**Michael W. Houpe '69**  
Oct. 21, 2016; Saint Augustine, Florida.

**Dorothy Jane "Dee" Howald MAEd '87**  
Dec. 20, 2016; Weaverville.

**Patricia R. Igleheart '73**  
Feb. 7, 2017; Atlanta, Georgia.

**Earl M. Irby '40**  
Oct. 14, 2016; Clute, Texas.

**Benjamin F. Jackson '55**  
March 18, 2017; Fort Collins, Colorado.

**Hope Edwards Johnson '44**  
March 16, 2017; Weaverville.

**James W. Jones '74**  
Nov. 9, 2016; Evans, Georgia.

**James Robert Kane '67**  
March 26, 2017; South Chatham,  
Massachusetts.

**Daniel E. King MAEd. '80**  
Feb. 22, 2017; Forest City.

**Martha S. Lanning '97**  
Dec. 7, 2016; Hendersonville.

**Jerry Liner Jr. '52**  
May 9, 2017; Dahlonega, Georgia.

**Ed L. Little '68**  
April 13, 2017; Raleigh.

**Vernon W. Loyd '65**  
April 18, 2017; Asheville.

**Clayton C. Love Jr. '74**  
May 1, 2017; Isle of Palms,  
South Carolina.

**James D. Lunsford '01**  
May 4, 2017; Clyde.

**Keith G. Martin '83**  
April 9, 2017; Raleigh.

**Pamela W. Martin '77**  
Feb. 10, 2017; Belmont.

**Franklin D. "Danny" McClure '60**  
April 2, 2017; Lexington.

**Jeremy Lee McClure '02**  
Oct. 29, 2016; Marble.

**Edward E. McGinnis '71 MAEd '76**  
Jan. 27, 2017; Black Mountain.

**Thomas M. Misenheimer '70**  
March 17, 2017; Oakboro.

**Mason P. Moore '98**  
May 16, 2017; Summerton, South  
Carolina.

**Roger D. Moore '93**  
Nov. 3, 2016; Waynesville.

**Sue A. Morgan MBA '80**  
March 1, 2017; Waynesville.

**John E. Murdock Jr. '68**  
April 13, 2017; Hendersonville.

**Michael C. Murphy '13**  
April 29, 2017; Mars Hill.

**Miriam Kay "Murray" Nixon '80**  
Oct. 27, 2016; Mount Holly.

**Alice L. Norment '67**  
Jan. 27, 2017; Marshall.

**Robert D. Ott '05**  
Feb. 2, 2017; Charlotte.

**Donald Overman '84**  
Dec. 8, 2016; Burlington.

**Joseph M. Parker MAEd '91**  
Jan. 19, 2017; Brevard.

**Sheila F. Patten '86**  
Jan. 13, 2017; Stow, Ohio.

**Gloria G. Polo MAEd '70**  
Jan. 28, 2017; Tampa, Florida.

**Kathryn S. Potts '74**  
April 5, 2017; Highlands.

**Howard S. Rahn '70**  
Jan. 31, 2017; Leicester.

**Carl B. Ramsey EdS '72**  
Jan. 29, 2017; Manning, South Carolina.

**Robert P. Reavis III '68**  
Dec. 3, 2016; McLeansville.

**Kaitlyn S. Reddy '16**  
Nov. 22, 2016; Hendersonville.

**William L. Reece '15**  
Feb. 6, 2017; Fayetteville.

**Brian David Riggs '80**  
Dec. 16, 2016; Fairview.

**Marylyn J. Rogers '57**  
Jan. 30, 2017; Hayesville.

**James D. Ruff '62 MAEd '84 EdS '88**  
April 12, 2017; Clyde.

**David J. Sachs '70**  
Oct. 10, 2016; Chestnut Ridge, New  
York.

**Dean A. Schofield MAEd '01**  
March 17, 2016; Boone.

**Andrew A. Scotchie Jr. MBA '78**  
Jan. 1, 2017; Asheville.

**Talley Mack Sharpe MAEd '69**  
Dec. 27, 2016; Gatlinburg, Tennessee.

**James L. Simpson '60**  
April 4, 2017; Meridian, Mississippi.

**Edward B. Singleton '52 MAEd '62**  
Feb. 9, 2017; Clayton, Georgia.

**Betty L. Smathers '78 MA '94**  
Nov. 17, 2016; Candler.

**Janice R. Smith MS '82**  
Feb. 6, 2017; Lenoir.

**William T. Smith '65**  
Feb. 1, 2017; Wake Forest.

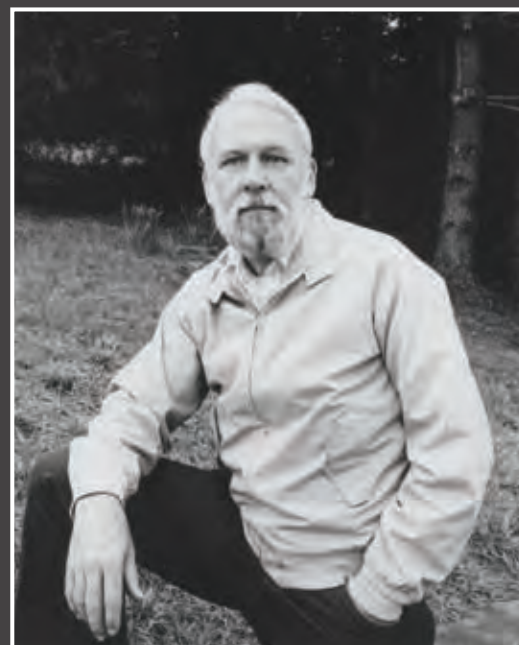
**Patricia R. Spain '80**  
Jan. 27, 2017; Hickory.

**Frank R. Stankunas '64**  
Dec. 18, 2016; Lake Worth, Florida.

**Constance C. Strong '72**  
Oct. 10, 2016; Evans, Georgia.

**Nancy S. Stroud MAEd '84**  
May 1, 2017; Rutherfordton.

**Steven T. Sutton '79**  
May 13, 2017; Waynesville.



## LATE BIOLOGY CHAIR HELPED GROW NATIVE PLANTS CONFERENCE

James Heathman "Jim" Horton, former head of the Department of Biology at WCU, died May 5 at the age of 86. Horton joined the WCU faculty in 1961, serving as department head from 1967 to 1974. A former chair of the Faculty Senate, he was president of the N.C. Academy of Sciences, delegate to the University of North Carolina Faculty Assembly and member of the Regional Planning Task Force of Great Smoky Mountains National Park. He was instrumental in coordinating WCU's annual Landscaping with Native Plants Conference. Horton retired in 1992 after 31 years of service. ■

**Kina B. Swayney '86**  
March 4, 2017; Cherokee.

**Clara H. Talley '60 MA '63**  
Nov. 6, 2016; Matthews.

**Kimberly W. Tipton '84 MAEd '88**  
Feb. 14, 2017; Mills River.

**David E. Turnipseed '68**  
Jan. 8, 2017; Moore, South Carolina.

**Everett D. Vaught '60**  
Feb. 26, 2017; Lizella, Georgia.

**Margaret L. Walker MAEd '56**  
March 24, 2017; Four Oaks.

**Jack R. Wallace '83**  
Nov. 27, 2016; Birmingham, Alabama.

**Steven D. Wallin '50 MAEd '56**  
March 22, 2017; Cornelius.

**Thomas E. Weatherman Jr. '82**  
April 4, 2017; Oologah, Oklahoma.

**Richard "Dick" M. White '51 MAEd '75**  
Jan. 31, 2017; Asheville.

**Charles K. Wike Sr. '49**  
April 28, 2017; Waynesville.

**Don C. Williams '64 MAEd '71 EdS '74**  
Dec. 3, 2016; Macon, Georgia.

**Thomas W. Williams '57**  
Feb. 18, 2016; Hendersonville.

**Myrtha R. Wilson '58**  
Feb. 19, 2017; Sylva.

**Richard E. Woollen '69**  
March 6, 2017; Maggie Valley.

**Louie A. Zimmerman '49 MAEd '56**  
May 13, 2017; Marshall.

## UNIVERSITY DEATHS

Thomas A. Blakley, retired dining services staff member, Oct. 25, 2016; Sylva.

Kelly Deitz Cochran, health services staff member, Dec. 13, 2016; Sylva.

Barbara A. Cosper, retired faculty member, College of Health and Human Sciences, May 10, 2017; Cullowhee.

**Lorraine G. Crittenden '69 MAEd '73**, retired English department faculty member, Feb. 9, 2017; Cullowhee.

Max Clyde Davis, retired facilities management staff member, Oct. 13, 2016; Bryson City.

**William Douglas Davis '49**, retired dean of men and assistant vice chancellor of student development, chair of Mountain Heritage Day, April 14, 2017; Cullowhee.

Frederick W. "Rick" Harrison, retired faculty member and head of the biology department, Dec. 29, 2016; Saint Helena Island, South Carolina.

Jack M. Hennessee Jr., friend, benefactor and former member of the Board of Trustees, March 15, 2017; Cullowhee.

Annie M. Hollifield, former staff member, Dec. 15, 2016; Asheboro.

James "Jim" H. Horton, retired faculty member and former head of the biology department, May 5, 2017; Cullowhee.

Robert N. Jakes, retired staff member, Nov. 25, 2016; Clyde.

**Tyree H. Kiser '51 MAEd '53**, retired director of admissions, Dec. 22, 2016; Cullowhee.

Melvin R. Laird, friend and benefactor, Nov. 16, 2016; Fort Myers, Florida.

James Ronald Marshall, retired mathematics and computer science faculty member, Dec. 17, 2016; Cullowhee.

**Patsy F. Mathis '88**, former staff member, residential living, March 10, 2017; Sylva.

Edward V. Morse, associate professor of social work, Oct. 27, 2016; Cashiers.

**Veronica L. Nicholas MPA '94**, friend of WCU and wife of James Carl Nicholas, retired faculty member and head of the English department, Nov. 29, 2016; Sylva.

Harry "Hal" L. Salisbury, former faculty member, director of counseling and director of continuing education, May 21, 2017; Charleston, South Carolina.

Otto Spilker, retired faculty member, health, physical education and recreation, May 5, 2017; Cullowhee.

Lewis F. Sutton, retired faculty member and head of the world languages department, Dec. 1, 2016; Indian Land, South Carolina.

E.J. "Little EJ" Whitmire, friend, benefactor and son of E.J. Whitmire, former member of the Board of Trustees, April 1, 2017; Franklin.

Alfred "Al" Wiggins, retired faculty member, School of Stage and Screen, Feb. 22, 2017; Jeffersonville, Indiana.

James E. Winstead, former dining services staff member, Nov. 14, 2016; Franklin.



## FIRST ADMISSIONS DIRECTOR GUIDED WCU'S EARLY GROWTH

**Tyree H. Kiser Jr. '51 MAEd '53**, WCU's first director of admissions, died Dec. 22 at the age of 89. A member of the first class of master's degree graduates, Kiser served for three years as principal of Sylva Elementary School before he joined the WCU staff. Student enrollment increased from approximately 1,000 in 1956 when he became alumni secretary and field representative to 6,800 during his leadership of the admissions office. Kiser received the Alumni Association's Outstanding Service Award in 1963 and the Paul A. Reid Distinguished Service Award in 1978. He retired in 1984 after 36 years of service. ■

## Alumni Board Votes Tallied

The votes are in for the latest round of elections for seats on the WCU Alumni Association board of directors. Elected to serve three-year terms ending June 30, 2020:

N.C. District 1 – **John Connet '92**, Hendersonville, Hendersonville city manager.

N.C. District 2 – **Beth Mauney Ludwig '92**, Lincolnton, North Lincoln Middle School teacher.

N.C. District 3 – **Dick Freeman '83**, Raleigh, Ingevity regional account manager.

N.C. District 4 – **Steve Wilson '02**, Wilmington, supervisory paramedic, U.S. Army.

Out-of-State District 5 – **Jeff Dowsnell '94**, Mount Juliet, Tennessee, Comcast NBC Universal sales director.



In addition to teaching at WCU, Al Wiggins (inset) was an accomplished stage and screen actor, including his role in the TV movie "The Hunter," shot in Charlotte in 1993.

## THE FINAL CURTAIN FALLS FOR BELOVED THEATER PROFESSOR AL WIGGINS

By JOE MONROE II '99

The world lost a treasure Feb. 22, the day the final curtain fell for Alfred Washington Wiggins. The second of three children born to educators in Louisville, Kentucky, Alfred followed his parents' education tradition. He received his master's degree in theater from the University of California, San Diego, and began to teach. Wig, as he was affectionately called by his students, came to Cullowhee in 1984. He would not know how that decision would affect so many lives.

To know Wig was to love him. Sure, that sounds cliché, but in this instance it is so true. A brilliant writer, orator, teacher, storyteller and actor, he rose through the ranks to become associate professor of communication and theatre arts at WCU. He founded WCU's Black Theatre Ensemble, providing black students an opportunity to perform and share their history and culture. Over the years, the ensemble performed across North Carolina and in several Southeastern and Midwestern states. It often presented Wig's original works, including "Us and Ours," a production illustrating how the church, family and a legacy of the spirit have enabled African-Americans to not only survive, but thrive.

Wig would engage in conversation with anyone. He was not one to try to convince you to accept his opinion, but he definitely would give you a lot to think about. Many WCU graduates, myself included, had the opportunity to be blessed with Wig's presence, knowledge and advice. He truly cared for his students. He was not only a professor, but also a father figure to many. That's not to say we needed a "father" in our lives. Many of us had that, but the guidance Wig gave was

needed because most of us were miles away from home. The state of North Carolina recognized his impact in 2001 when Wig received the Governor's Award for Excellence.

He made it a point to put education first. His passion was theater, radio and the arts in general, but when he spoke to you, he wanted to know how the whole person was doing. He wanted all of his students to succeed. He wanted students to understand their history and culture. He wanted students to be proud of where they came from – and where they were going. Whether it was through a story he told as we traveled to perform or through the performance itself, he made sure there was always a message to be given – and received.

Wig will be missed, but his legacy lives on through his students. His impact is felt today because he has several students who have gone on to follow his footsteps by performing, educating or both. Several former students are currently involved in productions on stage, TV, radio or film.

I was fortunate enough to extend my time with Wig after graduation as business partners and friends. It is hard to imagine where my life would be if I had not chosen WCU and if WCU had not chosen Wig. I am sure that sentiment is echoed by former students throughout North Carolina and beyond. Wig, thank you for sharing a piece of your journey with "us and ours." ■

*Joe Monroe II '99, a former Student Government Association president, lives in Louisville, Kentucky, where he is an actor and business owner.*



## MOUNTAIN HERITAGE DAY PIONEER LEAVES A LASTING LEGACY

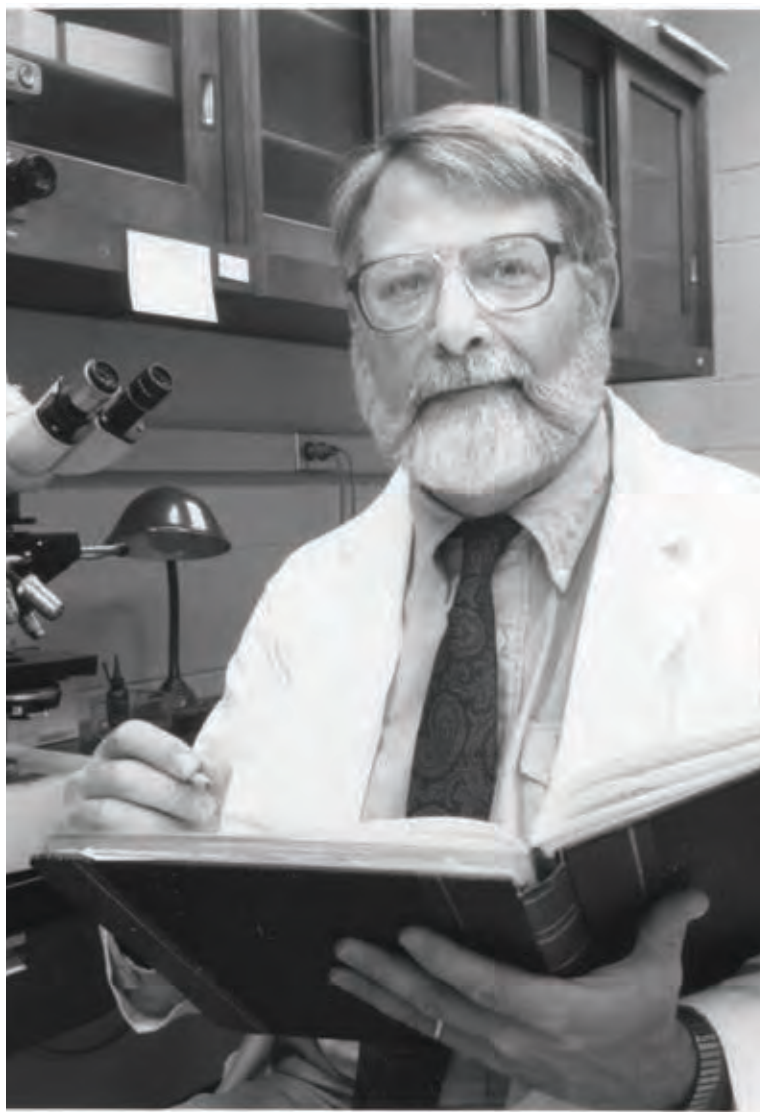
Doug Davis, a Western Carolina University staff member who served as chairman of the Mountain Heritage Day committee for 18 years, passed away April 14 in Sylva. He was 92 years old.

As a guiding force in the early days of WCU's popular event that celebrates Southern Appalachian culture and traditions, Davis established much of the format and started many of the functions that continue today. It was Davis who affixed Mountain Heritage Day to the last Saturday in September and led the festival to its position as a major regional celebration.

"Doug Davis was the architect of the Mountain Heritage Day celebration," said **Jim Rowell '72**, retired director of WCU's Public Relations Office and a former festival committee chair. "It was his design and handiwork that remain fundamental to why the festival has grown and prospered for decades. Doug managed to do what (then Chancellor) H.F. 'Cotton' Robinson had envisioned it to do – be a real link to culture, music, folks arts and essence of this region. It links the university and mountain people in a way nothing else has matched."

Davis retired as assistant vice chancellor for student development in 1992 after a 26-year career at the university, but remained involved with Mountain Heritage Day through subsequent years. He and his wife, Angela, who survives him, established an endowed fund in 2007 to help financially sustain the annual event.

"In 2014, when we created an exhibit celebrating the 40th anniversary of Mountain Heritage Day, we realized what an enormous influence Doug Davis had on the festival," said Pamela Meister, director of WCU's Mountain Heritage Center. "He served on the very first Founders Day steering committee, chaired the festival for its first 18 years, and was the recipient of the 1994 Mountain Heritage Award. Doug's hands-on leadership and infectious enthusiasm, as well as his Mountain Heritage Day costume of slouch hat, white shirt, and red suspenders, will live in the memories of generations of festivalgoers." ■



## HARRISON WAS THE UNIVERSITY'S FIRST O. MAX GARDNER AWARD WINNER

Frederick W. "Rick" Harrison, professor of biology and Western Carolina University's first O. Max Gardner Award winner, died Dec. 29 at the age of 78.

An internationally recognized authority on the biology of freshwater sponges, Harrison's academic and professional achievements were vast. He was editor-in-chief of the *Journal of Morphology* and editor of *The Microscopic Anatomy of Invertebrates*, a 23-volume encyclopedic treatise on the biology of animals without backbones. In 1991, he was named recipient of the O. Max Gardner Award, which recognizes the faculty member of the University of North Carolina system who has "made the greatest contributions to the welfare of the human race" in that year.

He earned bachelor's, master's and doctoral degrees at the University of South Carolina, where he played football. Before joining the WCU biology faculty in 1977, he taught at Presbyterian College in South Carolina and at the Albany Medical College in New York. His research took him from the bottom of the ocean, where he encountered a previously undescribed species of sponge, to outer space (at least vicariously), when he and a student placed sponges aboard a space shuttle flight to determine the effects of zero gravity on the creatures.

As Harrison's obituary put it: "He was relentless in dragging his family to obscure parts of the world in search of obscure invertebrates. No freshwater sponge was ever too rare, and no tax deduction was ever too small." ■



## OTTO SPILKER REMEMBERED AS QUINTESSENTIAL PE TEACHER

By TODD VINYARD

Being able to walk on his hands from one side of a gymnasium to the other is only one of the many things that bring smiles to former colleagues and students when they remember Otto Spilker. A favorite Western Carolina University physical education professor, Spilker died May 5 at age 90. He is remembered as a committed educator who urged students to put children first while being a living example of the fitness he taught in the classroom.

"He was an incredible athlete, and I've seen many," said Jim Hamilton, a retired WCU physical education professor who met Spilker for the first time in 1966. "What was most amazing was how he could control his body and do things others couldn't. He stayed active."

From walking across gyms on his hands to riding on campus on his tandem bicycle to being able to do complete gymnast moves well into his 70s, Spilker was a well-known figure on campus. Many had stories of watching in awe as Spilker would work out, usually in standard-issue gray shorts and T-shirt. He is equally remembered for the lessons about being a professional and caring he taught many students over 35 years.

"So many good memories of him," said former Jackson County educator **Larry McDonald '66 MAEd '70 EdS '83**. "I met him as a student in 1962. He was such a committed educator, and he wanted to be sure anyone he taught was ready. He reminded you over and over that you taught children and they were No. 1.

He inspired a professionalism about how you taught physical education."

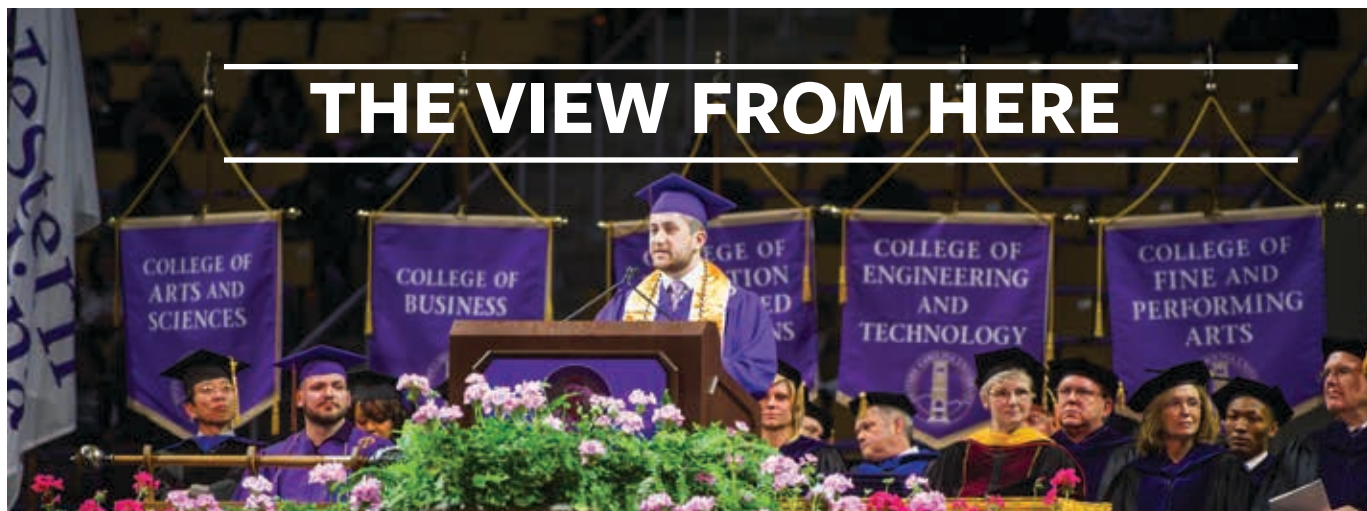
Spilker's career included being named the North Carolina Alliance for Health, Physical Education, Recreation and Dance College/University Professor Physical Education Teacher of the Year in 1993. He won the 1984 Taft Botner Distinguished Teaching Award in WCU's College of Education and Allied Professions. He received the WCU Outstanding Professor of the Year award in 1973 and the university's 1988 Paul A. Reid Distinguished Service Award.

Spilker once stated his teaching philosophy as: "Be ready. Over-prepared. If I don't know the material, I'm in big trouble." He was certainly prepared for racquetball games at Reid Gym, too. "I never could beat him," said **Dennis Proffitt '74 MAEd '89**, a former Jackson County educator and administrator. "He was not overpowering, but he would dink and dunk the ball in all corners of the court. You couldn't keep up with him. He had such a passion for staying active and teaching others to do it. He loved kids. I'm very thankful I had the opportunity to know him."

In Spilker's honor, friends and co-workers have created a scholarship awarded annually to students in the health and physical education program. To make a donation, visit the website [give.wcu.edu](http://give.wcu.edu). ■

*Reprinted in edited format with permission of The Sylva Herald*

# THE VIEW FROM HERE



## WCU ALLOWS ALL TO FIND THEIR PLACE IN THE WORLD

By BRANDON TRUITT '16

When I came to Western Carolina University, I quickly discovered there is something inherently special about this place – an unspoken yet agreed upon understanding that what we have in this space is unique and offers us the comfort and security to find out who we really are. It was in this place that I took the time to find out, for myself, who I really am.

When I was growing up, I always knew I was a little different. I spent a lot of my time in church, and I found my youth group to be a safe haven providing me with a solid group of friends. I played sports and was particularly good at baseball and soccer at a young age. I had a loving mother and father. Although they are divorced, they have been in my life equally with their support and guidance. Looking back, it can paint a pretty Norman Rockwell scene in your mind. But still, I knew something was different.

It was my freshman year when, after months of soul-searching and praying, I was finally face-to-face with myself, standing in front of my dorm room mirror. I had come to discover my reality. It was then when I was able to tell myself the three hardest words to leave my mouth: “I am gay.”

What a journey that was. I was raised relatively conservatively and with Christian values, which I still live by today. I kept thinking, this couldn’t be happening. At first, the realization and acceptance angered me. It terrified me that I was something I never thought I was supposed to be, something I never should be. Even today, it makes me nervous to talk about because I don’t want to offend or upset anyone and I know the intense and often dangerous hatred of the topic could be a factor in possibly ending relationships and friendships. I feared how my family would react, as this realization countered a lifetime worth of beliefs for many of them. But, at that moment, standing in front of the mirror, I knew for a fact this was my truth and I must walk in it.

There is something to be said about the purification – or cleansing – I went through to understand that sentence: This is my truth and I must walk in it. I slowly started to strip away barriers I had put up to keep my secret. I wasn’t being myself. Trying to hide it was exhausting, and hiding the truth only hid parts of my personality and my ability to connect with people. When I looked in that mirror, I was able to speak my truth and take my first steps walking in it.

Commencement is a day when we look back at life-changing

moments throughout our time at WCU. Each of us had something happen that we learned from, whether it’s failing a test and learning from your procrastination. Or maybe it’s a relationship that has had its ups and downs, but you’ve conquered more than you ever thought you would together, and you know you’re just getting started. Or maybe it’s having friends enter and exit your life and learning something they bring to you along the way.

I’m a firm believer in those lines from “Wicked” the musical: “People come into our lives for a reason, bringing something we must learn. And we are led to those who help us most to grow if we let them, and we help them in return.” If that doesn’t summarize college, I don’t know what does. Constant interactions with people who think, talk and act differently than we do only lead each of us to find out for ourselves what we believe in, allowing us to shape our own opinions.

Here, I have been immersed in incredible classroom debates and discussions that have opened my mind to new things that were never in my realm of possibility – fascinating, intimate conversations on some of our most fundamental forms of philosophy and government. WCU gave us that atmosphere to learn and to listen.

Yet, I notice that, as a society, we do not listen to each other anymore. I can’t scroll through my Facebook feed without seeing someone bashing another person’s opinions, shutting someone down with no contextual backing, just doing it because what they saw was different than their beliefs.

There are going to be people in life who are different, people who think, act, talk and walk differently. That’s totally OK. But we cannot fall victim to a political climate that screams, “I’m right, and you’re wrong.” As a society, we are going to disagree on key issues that can be controversial. But this country’s fiber is one that is formed around democracy, a form of government that allows for disagreement. Can we not disagree without demoralizing and ripping each other apart?

Western Carolina is a place that has allowed us to disagree and counter one another in a civil manner – face-to-face disagreements that have allowed us to come to our own understandings on topics. My hope is that, as a society, we can move forward with the same civility we have kept in our classroom discussions. ■

*This column is excerpted from an address delivered by **Brandon Truitt '16** at WCU’s fall 2016 commencement ceremony. A former Waynesville resident who earned degrees in communication and political science, he is now a reporter at WNCT-TV in Greenville.*



# CATAMOUNT

# PROUD

## HOMECOMING 2017

### Friday, Oct. 27

#### *"The Mutt" Catamount Football Golf Classic*

In remembrance of Coach **Alphonso "Mutt" Degraffenreid '77 MAEd '80**  
10 a.m. Laurel Ridge Country Club, Waynesville. For more information, contact the Catamount Club Office at [catamountclub@email.wcu.edu](mailto:catamountclub@email.wcu.edu) or call 828-227-3047.

#### *Homecoming Parade*

6:30 p.m. Main Street, downtown Sylva.

### Saturday, Oct. 28

#### *Zombie 5K Chase Race*

9 a.m. WCU Campus.  
All proceeds go to support the Mountain Area Pro Bono Physical Therapy Clinic. Register on [active.com](http://active.com). Information at Facebook page "Zombie Run 5K Chase Race."

#### *Chancellor's Brunch and Alumni Awards*

10 a.m.-noon. Honoring Alumni Association award recipients **Todd Vasos '83** (Professional Achievement), Dr. **Irene Hamrick '91** (Academic Achievement) and **David Joy '07 MA '09** (Young Alumnus) and WCU's Distinguished Service Award recipient Ed Broadwell; A.K. Hinds University Center Grandroom, \$15 per person, business attire. RSVP by Friday, Oct. 20. 877.440.9990, 828.227.7335 or [swgibson@wcu.edu](mailto:swgibson@wcu.edu).

#### *Tailgating*

Noon-3:30 p.m. Parking lots around E.J. Whitmire Stadium.

#### *WCU vs. Furman Football*

3:30 p.m. E.J. Whitmire Stadium/Bob Waters Field.  
Tickets: 800.34.GOWCU.

#### *African-American Alumni Postgame Reception*

6:30-8:30 p.m. Ramsey Center's Peele, Westmoreland Suhre, Hartshorn Hospitality Room.  
RSVP by Friday, Oct. 20.  
877.440.9990, 828.227.7335 or [swgibson@wcu.edu](mailto:swgibson@wcu.edu).

### Sunday, Oct. 29

#### *Inspirational Choir Concert*

2 p.m. A.K. Hinds University Center Grandroom. Information: 828.227.2276 or [ica@wcu.edu](mailto:ica@wcu.edu).

For more Homecoming information, visit [alumni.wcu.edu](http://alumni.wcu.edu).

**Western  
Carolina**  
UNIVERSITY

Alumni  
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WESTERN CAROLINA UNIVERSITY  
1 UNIVERSITY WAY  
CULLOWHEE, NC 28723

